THE CIRCLE

By KATHERINE CECIL THURSTON

Author of

"THE MASQUERADER"
and
"THE GAMBLER"

P 7 1/2
49.
40/-
(1)

THE CIRCLE

In youth we dream that life is a straight line; later, we know it to be a circle in which the present presses on the future, the future on the past.

"The spark that God sets in the few glowed in her voice and shone in her eyes."

The Circle

By KATHERINE CECIL THURSTON

Author of

"THE MASQUERADER,"
"THE GAMBLER,"
Etc., Etc.

A. L. BURT COMPANY, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

Copyright, 1903

By Katherine Cecil Thurston

All rights reserved

The University Press, Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.

To My Husband

2229105

The Circle

PART ONE—CHAPTER I

IT was a stormy night in November; out of doors, the wind swung through the street in a rocking gale, but in the parlour behind the curio shop, life seemed at its ebb. Old Solny pored over a musty book, and Anna stood with her head thrown back, her hands clasped behind her, her eyes seeing dreams; above them, on the dun-coloured wall, the Dutch clock ticked methodically, but otherwise the room was bereft of sound.

It was long before either moved; then Solny stirred automatically — all his actions were jerky and indirect — and Anna unclasped her hands. She watched him fumble for his handkerchief, and the corners of her mouth stiffened unconsciously as he opened the knotted corner and drew out his worn snuff-box, opening the lid with a little snap. Youth is all raw edges to the foibles of age, and Anna was not yet sixteen. She moved impatiently, and the dreamy look drifted from her eyes like a shadow before the sun.

"Father," she said, "it 's long past eight."

He turned, and a tiny cloud, like fine brown sand, scattered from his fingers along his sleeve.

"It 's after eight," she said again.

"So?" He shut his book reluctantly. "And the supper?"

"The supper has been ready for half an hour." There was no vexation in her voice; she spoke with the indifference of one schooled to wait. Life in the curio shop, in the little parlour behind it, in the cramped bedrooms upstairs, was one persistent waiting — for something that never came. She made the tea quietly in the Russian fashion that her father had brought with him to England many years before; then she took her place at the table and began to cut up the bread.

"There was another riot at the docks last night," she said, "and another robbery. White's gang this time."

"So?"

"A woman was robbed of a purse with ten bank-notes in it." She drew up her chair.

"So?" Old Solny stretched out a furtive hand and drew his book nearer by an inch.

"Yes. And she gave up the purse without a word."

"So?"

At the third exclamation the girl struck the table sharply with her hand. "Father," she cried, "do say something more! You make me feel so much —" her voice shook, "— so much alone." She glanced round the little room with its scanty furniture, its odds and ends, its accumulation of value and rubbish,

and her eyes suddenly filled with tears. She knew every detail, from the half-filled packing-cases crowded on the window-seat to the darkened ceiling, but she had never consciously spoken the word "home." She looked across the table, and, throwing back her head, tossed the tears out of her eyes.

"You 'd rather have one page of that old book than — than —"

Solny looked up perplexed; then he passed his finger lovingly over the manuscript. "But it is priceless," he said. "Merovingian — ten hundred and twelve." He returned to his place on the sixth page.

Anna cut herself another round of bread; then she sighed. "I wish I were a man!"

Solny went on deciphering; the storm shook the house in a further gale and the fire roared up the chimney.

"I wish I were a man!" she said again.

This time her father looked at her over his glasses. "Why, my child? Are you not content? Is the life not good?"

"Oh, good enough!" She leant back in her chair. "But if I were a man — if I were a man, father, I 'd get on board a ship and be a sailor. At the docks to-day the wind was roaring through the masts, and it sounded like a great, loud song; it made me mad to see the sea. The world and the sea must be very much alike." She rested her elbows on the table and took her face between her hands.

Solny made an unintelligible sound. "The world is fit for one thing," he said, — "to keep out of."

"But, father —"

"You talk too much, child. Get me the catalogue."

She rose. "Don't you think that the woman whose purse was stolen was a fool?"

"The catalogue!" His head was bent again.

She crossed the room, and pausing by the bookshelf, reached for a volume on the upper tier. "If I had been in her place, I'd have fought for what belonged to me — with White or any man." She tossed back her plait of thick red hair and blew some dust from the cover of the book. "It must be fine, you know, to feel like that — to feel in the middle of things, and not to care. Here it's just pearls and china jars and dust — always. Don't you ever want to go back?"

"Back where?"

"Oh, back into life; back into when you were young." She paused.

"When I was young," he said slowly, "there was persecution — poverty and persecution for every Jew. That was all."

She looked at him lingeringly. "It must be fine to be persecuted. Did you feel a hero?"

"No," he said shortly, and his head drooped.

Anna was studying the dial of the clock and missed the expression on his face. At the brusqueness of his answer her expression fell. "You are n't

a bit like a story," she said regretfully; "you never, never tell things; and you must have seen —" She made a descriptive gesture with her hands.

"You can see too much," he said laconically.

She sat on the back of a chair and swung her foot to and fro; the rise and drop of the wind was beating in her blood; she strummed an accompanying tattoo on the list book in her hand. "Oh, how I wish —"

Solny tapped the table with a gesture not unlike her own. "You talk too much," he said again. "The catalogue!"

Slowly she got to her feet and crossed the room; her senses, keen as razor blades, were racing at the heels of the wind. Within a yard of her father she paused; her head bent suddenly and the pupils of her eyes enlarged.

"Father, did you hear that?"

He turned a page.

"Father!"

The book dropped.

Anna's body was slightly bent and there was colour in her face. "Father, it's a row!" she said with conviction. "I can hear the running and the shouts. Father!" She clasped her hands. "Father, I heard someone cry out. Give me the lamp!"

The old man turned pale. "You are mad, Anna," he said tremulously. "What would you do? You are mad."

She was listening intently; the colour in her face

came and went like a flame. "Oh!" She drew in her breath. "Quick, father, the lamp!"

"You are mad," he faltered again.

She turned to him, a torrent of speech behind her lips; but in view of his frightened face the words died away. "Father," she said shortly, "let me pass. Can't you see that worlds would n't keep me back?"

He stretched out his hand, but her eyes and her ears were elsewhere. She flew past him like a whirlwind, and seized the copper lamp; ten seconds later, he heard her struggling with the bar of the shop door. "Anna," he called waveringly. "Anna, think of my treasures! My stock!"

But his only answer was the trail of smell and smoke that the lamp had left.

PART ONE—CHAPTER II

ANNA held the lamp above her head, and her fingers moved eagerly as they unfastened the catch of the bar. There was no fear in her face, no shadow of it in her mind; her whole being was absorbed in one idea — the knowledge that between her and the rush of life there stood only one small door.

She heard her father stumble, she heard a dragging sound, as he pulled back the curtain that divided the parlour from the shop; then she quickened her movements and the bar dropped from the door with a clang. An instant later, she blew out the lamp.

"If there is a row, it 's best to have no light. Do you hear, father?"

Solny responded inaudibly; his voice had the piteousness of a child's.

Anna smiled. "It 's all right. Here 's my hand." She held out her hand, and to her impatience the minute seemed interminable, before his fingers, groping in the air, found and grasped her own.

"But you can do no good — and I dislike the dark. Anna!"

"I was n't thinking about doing good. I want to see things. Are you ready?"

His hand tightened on hers.

"Father!" she said afresh. "You can hear it again now — if you listen hard. It's away behind the house; it's back in Enbury Street, but the wind is blowing it round the corner. Can't you hear? Voices and running?" She pulled him forward, and for a space there was no sound in the place beyond their differently taken breaths.

Then she straightened herself. Solny shrank against her arm, but she moved him aside and took a fresh step forward. "Just wait for me, father — and don't light the lamp. I'll be back in a minute — I only want to see."

"But, Anna —" He groped forward and caught her arm. "If you must go, go by the yard into the Passage — it's easier, it's safer than the front door."

She laughed. "And be trampled to death in the Passage if a crowd came up. 'T will be all right, father; I'll shut the door — and I'll knock when I'm ready to come back. Now!" With a roar from the freed wind that whirled her skirts and whistled in her ears, she let the door fall open and stood framed in the aperture. For a moment she breathed in the freshness of the night; then she moved forward, drawing the door with her. A second later, it closed with a gentle thud — shutting her on the outer side.

The street was a sweep of grey, whipped clean by the gale. To her right, as she paused on the narrow foot-path, ran the by-way known as the Passage; an

ill-kept lane that joined Enbury Street with Spinner's Alley, and into which the yard at the side of Solny's house opened by a little door. To her right stretched Felt Street, on which the shop front opened, a place of no great width, stone-paved and possessing houses of enormous age. She glanced along its length with impartial eyes. It was unattractive in the day; it was even more uninviting in the night. It had a desolate air — the desolate monotony of an over-familiar scene. She knew every curve in the eaves, every stone in the pavement. Her eyes wandered from one object to another. First, beyond the curio shop, came the baker's; then the pawn-shop with its flaunting sign; then the tiny cul-de-sac, no more than a gaping mouth among the dull shadows; then — But her eyes grew weary; she turned and walked a step or two towards the corner; then paused again. On the opposite side the jutting houses were a black mass, save where a candle showed through a scanty blind or a street lamp caught reflections in a window-pane. Everywhere were silence and shadow and an apprehensive sense of things to come. She put up her hand and smoothed the long wisps of hair that the wind had blown free of her plait. Then she gave a slight cry and stepped backward, as a dog fled round the corner of the Passage and darted down Spinner's Alley with a howl. A second later, hot upon its precursor, came another fugitive; but, unlike the dog, it lurched into the cross streets

with the speed of a badly-launched arrow, and there paused.

Anna felt her blood ebb and her breath catch. She stood immovable, her hand suspended in the air. In the uncertain light the new-comer was not easy of definition — beyond the fact that he was a man and small of stature; nevertheless, as he paused in the open space with the breathless stillness of a hunted animal, his figure showed up impressive and grey.

The pause was instantaneous, but to the girl it seemed immense. She moved; the man turned; and in the half gloom she felt, rather than knew, that their glances met. The wind was blowing from him to her; her skirts flapped like sails at sea; her hair, blown across her eyes, momentarily blinded her; faint and yet distinct came the sound that she had heard from the parlour — the noise of massed feet and voices, that is like no other sound on earth. She tossed the hair out of her eyes and looked towards the man.

It was patent at a glance that the oncoming sound had reached him as soon, or sooner, than it had her. He seemed to sway for an instant in despair, then to gather decision from the very presence of his fear. With a flash that was almost intuition, she defined his glance, wild and eager, as he revolved suddenly, facing each of the intersecting streets in turn; and with an articulate sound of excitement, her mind leaped to the same solution, at the same instant, as did his.

"The black alley!" she said below her breath; and she clasped her hands and shut her eyes as he fled past her up the cul-de-sac, beyond the baker's and the pawn-shop; then she turned and stood against the corner — facing the Passage. Almost instantaneously the crowd, blocked by its own haste in the narrow outlet, found egress and poured into the open space. There it wavered, fell asunder, drew together again, and finally stood still.

Anna watched it steadily. With a throb of excitement she realised the situation and waited events. It was a second or two before she was seen; then, with a vague impulsiveness that always marks a mob, the press swayed towards her, moving in upon the foot-path, while the outer stragglers spread in a dark tail across the street.

"Seen a man?" demanded a voice in the foreground; and a dozen other voices instantly echoed the question.

The colour rushed into Anna's face; the joy and danger of her position assailed her in a rush.

"Speak up!" came from the centre of the throng. The crowd wavered towards her, then receded momentarily; the breath from many throats was carried to her across the wind. She suddenly looked up.

"What sort of man?" she said.

"A small man." The words were spasmodic; the chase had been a hot one.

"He war n't so small, neither."

"Shut up!" The first man turned.

"'Bout my size," put in a third, pushing to the front only to be elbowed back.

Anna clasped her hands behind her. For the first time in her existence issues of real moment were at stake. She glanced quickly over the faces that confronted her, and to her inner eyes the picture of the fugitive alone in the grey street rose plain and sharp — the panic of his last movements, the incongruity of one man against fifty. She tightened her fingers and her eyes gleamed.

"He was a small man," she said. "I saw him quite plainly. He was a small man."

"That's right! Small he was. But look sharp!"

"I came out to get a breath of air and to feel the wind; I was leaning against the door —" She spoke with slow, deliberate unconcern.

A wave of impatience crossed the crowd. A man on the outer edge jostled and pushed.

"She's kiddin' you, mate!" he called; and a laugh, followed quickly by a growl, rose and dropped again.

"Maybe she's hidin' him," volunteered another. "There's 'oles enough!"

Several exclamations followed this, followed in their turn by an ominous sway towards the footpath, towards the pawn-shop and the cul-de-sac. Anna felt it, and felt her resolution quail; then, with an effort that was inspiration, she drew herself very straight.

"Stop!" she cried. "Stop!" Her voice rang;

even the tumultuous stragglers paused, surprised into quiet. She waited for a second, her head held high, her face very pale ; then she spoke with direct force.

"Look here," she said, "you found this street quiet, you 'd better leave it quiet. About making fools of you — I could n't do that, for you 're fools already ; I 'd hunt a man better myself. A question and an answer, and you 'd have had him five minutes ago ; instead — "

The man who had been the first to speak caught her arm. She flung him off fiercely. "Don't touch me!" she said. "I can talk without that. The man you 're after came down the Passage before you ; he stood for a second at the cross streets, looking up and down ; then he saw me and bolted down Spinner's Alley. You 'll have to run, if you want to catch him now!" She laughed. The laugh was strained and pitched too high ; but a crowd is not sensitive to shades of tone. There was a shuffling wait, a noisy indecision, then someone in the background shouted "Stop thief!" One man turned and ran, a second followed, then a third. Before a minute had gone by, before the girl had taken and let go a dozen breaths, the mass of humanity had wheeled in a body ; the street was still and grey once more, its only audible disturbance the wind amongst the house-tops, the shrill voices growing fainter at every step. With swift reaction she leant back against the door.

The moment of vitality was passed, her knees

trembled and there was a singing in her ears. She stood immovable for a considerable space, then suddenly she sprang alert to the remembrance of the rescued man. From the shadows on her right, someone was moving steadily nearer inch by inch. The light from the scattered gas-lamps was poor; she bent forward in keen curiosity; then abruptly she drew back.

"Oh!" she said involuntarily. "Oh!"

At no time would the sight have been a pleasant one; in the half dusk of the quiet street it almost possessed elements of fear. The figure of the man was small and deformed, his face had the bluish hue of chalk, his lips trembled, a dark stain ran across the forehead from eyebrow to temple.

For an instant Anna's capacities swam; then, with equal speed, her sense of necessity sprang into its place.

"What 's happened to you?" she asked. "What have they done to you? You are hurt — cut!"

He gazed at her in a stupor of silence; it struck her that his eyes were unusually large.

She moved nearer, conquering her repulsion. "Do you know that you are safe — quite safe?"

His lips moved, but no sound came; he had outstripped speech by several degrees.

"But you are! Wake up! Understand! You are safe — quite safe." She caught his shoulder and shook it gently to enforce the words; then she drew back and looked at her hand. It was stained with

the blood that had dropped from his forehead to his coat. With a shock of feeling, she turned and rapped violently on the shop door.

There was a long wait, an incredibly long wait, then the hinges creaked, the dark shop opened before her like a cave, and the dry smell — the combination of Eastern spice with Western must that had grown with her into existence — floated out on the cold air. Pushing the stranger before her, she stumbled through the door. Then she raised her voice.

"Father, father, are you there? Strike a light!"

Silence followed; someone shut the door with a thud, then drew a match slowly across a box. It flared for an instant, lighting the scene — the shop with its litter, its cobwebs, its shadows; the bent form of old Solny, as he held it aloft; the drawn, haggard face of the rescued man. The united effect verged on the grotesque.

Anna felt herself turn cold again; but she laughed. "Real life is rather terrible," she said huskily; "but — but it 's fine, all the same." She sank down suddenly on an empty box.

PART ONE—CHAPTER III

THE match flamed, flickered, and then fell, and once more there was the darkness with its magnified sense of spice and must. For a space no one spoke; then at last Anna broke the silence, her vitality re-asserting itself with a rush.

"Father," she cried sharply, "another match and the lamp and hot water. This man is cut to bits!"

Solny fumbled; then a fresh light flared up and showed the stranger leaning against the wall, his hands hanging by his sides, his eyes glowing like lamps in the uncertain gloom. A tinge of pity moved Anna — the sense of ownership and gentleness that one feels towards a rescued animal; and with one of her rapid impulses she rose. Solny had set a light to the lamp, and she crossed the shop quickly, treading with caution between the china and the stacks of books.

"You 're very weak," she said. "Put your arm round my neck; I 'll help you to walk."

The man wavered for an instant, then obeyed.

"Now, father," she called, "go before us with the light, and we 'll want a big fire — heaps and heaps of coal. Are you ready?" She turned to the

stranger, passing her arm about his body; and together — he swaying slightly, she measuring her steps with care — they crossed the dusty floor to the little room behind.

In the parlour the fire was casting orange flames; the homely supper was still to be removed. For the first time Anna realised the grip of familiar things. "Draw up the arm-chair, father," she said; then she turned again to the new-comer. "It's rather unsteady, but you must n't mind."

He glanced at her, and a peculiar expression, a look that was ironical and yet patient, touched his face. "No, Fräulein," he said in somewhat slow and halting English, "I do not think that I shall mind." Then quite suddenly and quite quietly he fainted in her arms.

It happened in a second; the whole thing seemed as natural and as much in sequence as a scene upon the stage. Anna realised it on the instant, as she bent to the additional weight; Solny grasped the fact a moment later, and between them they laid him on the ground, opening his collar for greater air. For a space they watched him breathlessly; then with a certain uneasy haste Solny rose from his knees. He leant deprecatingly against the table, pushed his glasses onto his forehead, drew them down again, then spoke.

"If you don't really need me, Anna," he said hesitatingly; "if you don't really need me, there's a sentence in that manuscript that baffles me. You

know I have been much upset to-night." His glance wandered wistfully from the unconscious figure of the stranger to the book still lying beside his plate.

Anna followed his gaze, then quite suddenly she laughed — a spontaneous, irresistible laugh. "Oh, father, you are different from everyone in the world! Give me the cold water and a bowl and I'll let you go; I can see your fingers twitching. Life is very amusing, after all!" She threw back her head and her teeth gleamed; she had gained a new standpoint, though an unrealised one.

For a long time, and very carefully, she bathed the stranger's face, then quite calmly she tied up his wound: she had none of the dread of unconsciousness that troubles less steady brains. She studied his features with candid curiosity, her lips remaining parted in the questioning attitude of a child. "Father," she said suddenly, "suppose he never wakes at all?"

She hardly expected an answer, and she received none. Solny was separated from her by eight centuries. She bent, laying her ear to the stranger's lips; then she redoubled her splashings on his face and hair. When at length his throat trembled and his eyelids hesitatingly stirred, his first sight of a returning world was a pair of brilliant eyes and a mouth that quivered in its eagerness to smile; and the welcome was so exhilarating and so new that he forgot his troubles, his pain and the inci-

dents that had brought him there; and accepting the moment as it was, returned the smile.

"Ah, that's better!" Anna drew a long breath. "For a while I thought you were dead. And, do you know, I never dreamt that you could smile — you have such gloomy eyes. Father!" She raised her voice. "Father, put away the book, he's awake again. Come and help him into the chair."

Solny shuffled round the table; his glasses were firmly fixed and his eyes looked preoccupied. He put his hands under the man's lean arms and raised him. "Dear me," he said, "how thin you are! I suppose you know nothing of Merovingian manuscript? I have put my hand upon a marvel."

The man smiled again in spite of the pain his movement caused. "I am of little use, I fear, in any way."

Anna interposed. Action was her sphere; her face looked radiant. "Back to your book, father, we sha'n't disturb you for an hour. But first, where's the French brandy?"

Solny gazed round abstractedly. "Where did I put the key?" he said. "The brandy is in the top cupboard, but the key —"

Anna was trembling with impatience. "Never mind the key; you know you forget to lock the cupboard in any case." She sprang to a chair, poising herself lightly. The stranger's eyes followed her attentively; she seemed all youth and strength. "Of course!" she cried with a laugh.

"Of course! The cupboard is as open as the day." She thrust her hand into the recess and drew out a squat bottle of old-fashioned make. "Now this is pure gold," she said seriously, "and must be taken in drops, like gold is melted in the mint." She sprang down, and her eyes flashed in the brilliance of the fire.

"I'll set the kettle to boil, and then put three lumps of sugar in a tumbler — So! That's right, is n't it, father?"

Solny muttered an assent.

"And you'll feel as strong and well as if to-night had never been." She came and stood by the newcomer. "Already the pain is better, eh?"

"Already, Fräulein."

"That's right! But you must n't call me Fräulein; I'm just Anna, you know — to everyone."

The man looked up.

"And you —" She stirred the fire. "What are you called?"

He looked down again. "Johann," he said shortly.

She repeated the name. "And nothing else?"

"Nothing else." He spoke after a pause.

She seemed satisfied. "You are a German, eh?"

"I come from Vienna."

There was another silence; then the girl spoke again. "Listen to the kettle. It's going to sing. Is Vienna very big? Bigger than London?"

"Not so big — but brighter."

"Very bright?" She lifted off the kettle and

poured some water over the sugar and brandy already in the glass.

"For some — very bright."

"Ah, I shall go there some day — and to Paris." She moved towards him, carrying the tumbler. "Are there theatres in Vienna?"

"Oh, many." He took the glass.

She looked at him suddenly, her face alight. "Have you seen the theatres — the great actors and actresses on the stage?" There was a tone in her voice that he had not observed before.

"Oh, yes." He looked at her in some surprise.

She returned the glance seriously. "I'd rather go to a theatre, you know, than to Heaven — much. I have seen plays in booths but never on the stage."

He sipped his drink and watched her wonderingly. She seemed so young, yet so individual — so markedly much herself. It struck him instinctively that some natures are made to take, as others are made to give. The thought was irrelevant and fleeting, but it threw a shadow across his eyes.

"You have a sad thought," she said intuitively, "and sadness is n't allowed. I found you, you know, and I can allow or not, as I like; you belong to me." She patted his hand and smiled. "To-morrow and after to-morrow you can tell me about all you have seen; but to-night you must rest — just rest."

"But, Fräulein —"

"What?" She frowned quickly.

He made a deprecating motion with his hands.

"Fräulein, you know that I cannot stay here — You know that — "

She drew back swiftly. "Father, did you hear that?" Disappointment and tears trembled in her voice.

"What, child? What? You have made me lose my place."

"Father, I found him and saved him and brought him in, and now he wants to go!"

The man in the big chair moved uncomfortably. "Not wants, Fräulein — "

"Yes, wants." She turned on him sharply, then looked again towards Solny. "Father, did you hear?"

Solny ran his fingers desperately through his hair. "Have what you will, child," he said testily. "Have whatever you will; but leave me in peace. If you want him, no doubt he 'll stay. Give him the attic room that John Desinski used; give him anything you like — but don't speak again." He turned in his chair and put his hands over his ears.

The others confronted each other silently.

"But, Fräulein — "

Anna raised her hand and moved nearer by a step. "It 's very well to talk about going," she said, "but can you go?" Then her manner changed; her voice softened and she smiled. It was like a wave of sun through a chill room. "How do you arrange to

walk, when you can't stand alone?" She bent down and looked into his face, and again the firelight seemed reflected in her eyes. "We have an empty room here, and a good welcome. It is n't very nice of you to go."

He looked up helplessly.

"It is n't very kind of you, when I want you to stay."

Her clear gaze met his. "When I am so alone; when I — when I would like so much to have a friend. Won't you stay — Johann?"

The appeal was irresistible. There was a long silence; he looked down, then looked up. "I am what in English you call a beggar," he said harshly.

She watched him for a second. "Then teach me to talk in German," she said, "and we 'll never use the word."

PART ONE—CHAPTER IV

SUCH was the advent of Johann. He came as a thunderbolt might have come, in a whirl of confusion; and like the thunderbolt when its thrill of life is passed, he lay where he had fallen, sinking deep into the soil of a new existence — too inert and passive to seek farther fields. He slept in the bed that had once belonged to John Desinski, a Polish artist who had died in the attic above the shop, and he slept with the exhaustion that follows tumult of the nerves; the pain of his wound lost itself, and the past, with the present, fell away before the necessity of rest. When he opened his eyes after many hours and blinked before the sunshine of a fresh day, it was with scarcely any consciousness of the previous night.

He looked at the unsteady dressing-table with its white cloth; he caught a glint of sun mirrored back from the water in the ewer; he watched the shadows chequering in drab squares on the bare boards; and then, with a peculiar realisation of shelter, he let his eyelids droop again.

A cautious shaking of the door-handle was his second summons back into the world.

"May I come in?"

The voice brought a sudden colour to his face and made him raise his hand to the unsightly bandage on his head.

"If you will, Fraülein."

"Say Anna — or you get no breakfast." The voice tingled with a pleasant sense of life; he closed his eyes again and let it throb through him. It warmed his mind like an intangible fire.

"Well?" An impatient foot beat on the floor outside. "I can't hold the tray for ever."

He laughed in nervous response. "Please then — Anna."

With an accompanying sigh of relief the door was pushed in; and then it seemed to him that a second morning was created in the room, that a second flood of light poured through it from some unguessed source.

"Good morning, Johann!" She came slowly across the room. "I have made the coffee as father likes it — and that means a lot; and I wasted three pieces of bread before the toast came right." She carefully balanced the tray. "But are you better?" Her tone sank, and a solicitous look crossed her eyes; it was one of her characteristics that her face and voice were a glass to her thoughts — reflecting sensations to the finest point. "Poor Johann!" she said simply. "Just for a second, you know, I forgot." She helped him to sit up, and placed the tray across his knees; then she leant against the foot rail and prepared to watch him eat.

After a full minute's silence she spoke again. "Do you remember anything about last night?"

The words, light and unmeant, acted on him curiously. He bent forward, and laid his cup down with so jerky a movement that some of the coffee was spilt on the sheet. "Don't," he said nervously. "I had forgotten about last night. Your kindness and the daylight made me forget." He covered his eyes, and it seemed to the girl that his hand shook. She wondered quickly if his reason was entirely sound.

The deformed, like the blind, are quick of instinct; he looked up, half conscious of the thought that had crossed her mind. "You are not to be afraid," he said gently: "it is I who must be that." He stared past her at the window; and it seemed to her that in his glazed eyes there were visions of the night before — of the streets, of the crowd — of the uncertain, baffling lights. She laid her hand on his shoulder with a firm, protective touch.

"Tell me what it is. Tell me what 's the matter." She stroked his arm. "Sometimes, you know — not very often, of course, but sometimes — I have a secret of my own; and then I always tell it to my father. He does n't always hear, but that does n't matter; the secret is gone and does n't weigh any more. If you 'll tell me yours, I 'll listen all I can, and then 't will go from you — right away from you. See!" She touched his hand entreatingly, soothingly.

He turned to her. "But you are a child. Why should I tell my thought to you?"

For an instant she looked annoyed; then she smiled again. "You 'll tell me because you 'll have to. You 'll tell me to-morrow if you don't to-day. And you 're quite wrong about my being a child."

He looked at her, so young, so reliant, a type of the world apart from him; and a sweeping bitterness surged through his mind — the bitterest of all bitter things, the knowledge of being aloof. Unconsciously he bent his head.

She too was silent for a space, the sense of his depression weighing on her without explanation. She moved to the window, and drawing back the curtain, let in an added flood of light. Then she turned, bathed in its brightness. "Is there anything so fine as the light?" she said.

He lifted his head. "And the darkness? What of the darkness?"

"Oh, I don't count that. There must be darkness of course, as well as sun, but when it comes we can shut our eyes." She tried to read his expression, but it puzzled and evaded her.

"Ah, yes, for you — you carry the brightness with you; even your hair is like a torch."

She glanced at his swiftly; then raised her hand. "My red hair! You are laughing?"

"No, not laughing." His voice lapsed again.

"How old are you?"

"Thirty." He sighed.

"Thirty!" She considered for a while. "Half father's age, and nearly twice mine. Johann, will we

forget about the sun and the shadow and things, and be friends?" She held out her hand.

He took the hand questioningly. His own fingers were thin and pallid, hers looked full of force by contrast. They both looked down, and Anna laughed.

"I believe I could squeeze hardest. See!" She tightened her grasp; then suddenly let go. "Have I hurt you? Your face went all red."

"It was not pain," he said hastily. "It was — Never mind what it was; some day you will know perhaps." He drew away his hand and raised the coffee-cup again.

"But I want to know now. What was it?"

He was silent.

"Johann, what was it?"

"It was nothing." He broke a piece of toast. "What does your father say of me to-day?"

She laughed. "Father! Shall I tell you?" Her mind was tossed by a new thought as a leaf is blown by the wind.

"Yes." He sat up straight.

"Well, after breakfast —" She settled herself comfortably against the foot rail. "You know he always reads at meals and never talks till after. After breakfast, he put down his book and rubbed his glasses; then he asked me quite seriously if there were rats in the attic room; he said he heard noises there last night." She threw back her head and went into another peal of laughter, so fresh and amused that Johann joined.

"Ah, that's good!" she said suddenly. "You look like a boy when you laugh."

He drew back sensitively; his laughter died away and the old sad gravity fell over his features like a mask. "He had forgotten me, then?" he asked with embarrassed haste.

"Oh, not forgotten, just overlooked. I reminded him of course; I told him you'd slept in the attic room. He looked very wise for a while, then he seemed to wake up. 'Ah, so!' he said. 'The young man who can't decipher. Tell him to catalogue the Egyptian scarabs, if he can find the time.' So your place is fixed for you; there's no running away." She laughed afresh. "But that's all father said; he went out of the room rubbing his book at the corners, like this—" She mimicked the action of a bookworm with such precision that once more Johann was compelled to smile.

"Anna," he said suddenly, "what do they tell you of yourself?"

She looked at him uncomprehendingly; then after a long pause she answered with simple force, "When nobody ever thinks of me, how can anybody talk of me?"

Johann felt suddenly abashed.

PART ONE—CHAPTER V

IT was eleven o'clock when Anna slung a basket over her arm and went out to buy dinner for the day. She was marketwoman and cook in the curio shop, as well as mistress, and the duties that fell to her were varied and numerous. She bought a fish, an armful of vegetables, a packet of lentils, some coffee and dried figs; then, her errand finished, she turned homeward. The reflection of the morning was in her eyes, an audible song rose occasionally to her lips, for the lulled storm had left a wintry sunshine behind it that quickened the blood.

"Father," she cried, as she swung into the shop, "you ought to go out! There's a feel in the air to-day that would wake you." Then, as Solny made no answer, she looked farther into the darkness. "What, Johann! Who gave you leave to dress?" She laid down her basket and went forward hurriedly. "What are you doing? Cataloguing? How silly, with a wounded head!"

Johann raised a pallid face. "It only hurts a little; beside — beside, I like to be occupied."

Anna shook her head. "How silly!" she said again. "You look ghastly; you can hardly stand."

"Then I will sit for a little." He looked uncertainly about.

But the girl intervened. "Come into the kitchen; you can have a place by the fire, while I work."

He assented easily, following her across the shop and through the living-room, to the kitchen beyond; it seemed that he lacked force to reason for himself. Seen by day, his face looked meagre; and the deformity that by night had appeared shadowy, showed cruelly in the colder light.

Anna drew a wooden chair to the grate, and picking up a bellows, set the fire in a blaze. From her place by the hearth, she glanced up at him. "Your face is all pinched," she said, "and your fingers are blue with cold. I 'll have to look after you, I see."

He sat down docilely, and a silence fell.

She washed the lentils for the soup, sliced the onions and broke up the celery, but her eyes and her attention were, all the while, on the stranger's face; it was with a preoccupied air that she finally began to prepare the fish.

Johann, in his turn, was uneasy. He moved, sighed, thrust his hands into his pockets, then sighed again; at last he rose. "It is of no use," he said, "I cannot sit quite still. It was the same when you left this morning, I could not lie in bed." He walked nervously to the dresser, his hands hanging by his sides. Anna, watching him intently, felt that he thirsted to speak; but she kept her head silently bent.

"Anna!" He fingered the plates.

"Yes."

"Oh, it is of no use." He crossed to the window, then walked back again. "Anna, I cannot keep it to myself. The sweat breaks out every time I think. I am a coward — a coward!" He sorted a heap of plates till they rattled.

She watched him unswervingly. "I suppose we are all cowards, Johann."

The steadiness of her tone mastered him; he ceased his nervous gestures and passed again to the window, where he stood looking out. "If I only dared —" he said at last.

She crossed the room, and slipping her arm through his, led him back to the fire. "Now, tell me what it is."

He dropped into his former seat and covered his eyes. "I have been robbed," he said abruptly, "and I am afraid." He slowly wiped the dampness from his face.

Anna returned to the table and began to slice the fish. There was a long pause; then she spoke. "Suppose you begin at the beginning. Most things have a beginning, you know." Secret-hunting was new to her, but she had a keen instinct for the right act and the right word. "Most things have a beginning," she said again in a level voice.

The tonic acted; he sat up. "It was like this —" He cleared his throat.

"Take lots of time; I have the fish to cut up and wash and dry."

He steadied himself, drawing a short breath. "For many years I have served a jewel merchant in Vienna — Golstock by name; a man who has built a great fortune for himself; a hard man; a man with a will of stone." He paused and drew breath again. "I have been with him for ten years; it was he who taught me the English — to speak and to write; I have kept portions of his English correspondence for four years. A little while ago he called me to his private room —"

The man stopped; and the only sound that broke the silence was the steady slicing of the fish.

"He called me to his private room —" He paused again.

The girl waited, drawing her finger-tip slowly across the tip of the knife. Her curiosity was running riot, but she kept a level voice. "Yes — I understand."

He pulled the edges of his handkerchief through his fingers, seeking nerve in the friction of the stuff. "You wonder why I hesitate and halt," he said, "and shiver when I speak of him? I will tell you why. It is because I have feared him all these years. He is a man who rules by fear."

"Why have you stayed with him all these years?"

"That I hardly know." He passed his hand again over his face. "The same reason, I suppose, that made me come to London on his errand; the reason

that makes men like him rule men like me — always; with just a word or a look from the eye."

Anna looked down at her knife. "What about the private room?"

"I am coming to that." He moved nervously. "When I entered the room he was sitting at his desk, and beside him, on the top of many papers, was a leather case; he was tapping it with his fingers as I came in. 'This is for a lady in London,' he said. 'It must reach her in three days; I am going to trust it to you.' He opened the case and showed me what lay inside — five ornaments of pink topaz with pearl and diamond rims; two pins, a ring, a hair clasp and a dagger. I remember, for I had to count them many times, till he was satisfied I should not forget. They were very brilliant and dazzled me a little, but I took them out and looked at them one by one. At last I asked him what they were valued for. He laughed. 'You are not paid to valuate,' he said. 'Never see beyond your own horizon.'

"I hesitated for a moment. It was not that I feared the responsibility — though a rose-coloured topaz from Brazil is something to be prized; but I was uncertain. I asked him at length why he had chosen me. He looked at me slowly with his hard eyes; then he laughed once more. 'I choose you, Johann,' he said, 'because you are a fool. In the case of valuables, one honest fool is better than ten clever rogues.'"

Johann stirred uneasily at the remembrance of the look, and Anna felt the colour flood her cheeks as it had done when she faced the crowd.

"What did you do?" she asked.

He shifted his position awkwardly. "I did nothing — it did not seem that there was anything to do." The slow precision of his English, the careful forming of his sentences made his meanings painfully clear.

"Go on!" She returned to her preparation of the fish. "How I should hate that man!"

"Do you hate me?"

"You? How silly!" She tossed back her plait.

"Do you despise me?"

"What a question! Tell me what you said to Golstock."

"I said nothing. He always talks."

"Well?"

"I consented to do the errand." Johann's voice was humble and low.

"I would n't have consented."

"No; you would not." He waited for a little: then took up his theme again. "He gave me my route and my destination. I was to travel to Belgium in the least frequented way; and reaching Antwerp, to cross to London by the sea. People with valuables take the quickest means, I was to take the slowest. It was all arranged; it is a whim of Herr Golstock's — working out these little schemes. It is his only whim that I have known; made since

years ago he had a packet of rubies stolen in the post." He stopped to collect his ideas; and when he spoke again it was with more rapidity and force.

"The end came through a countryman — a big Austrian with a yellow beard. He came on board the ship when I did, and we climbed the gangway side by side. During the day he spoke — casting a word to me now and then in the English, with a pleasant smile. But it was at night in the cabin that he played his card.

"We were crowded together — some in bed, some undressing; the ship pitched; and the smell of the swinging lamp was very rank. An argument was running at the centre table, but the voices cut each other so that nobody tried to hear. Then out of the medley, like a gunshot, came a bang, as the Austrian struck the table with his hand. Everybody turned round. 'If I had the value of ten gold coins,' he said, 'I would throw them overboard, sooner than land with them to-morrow night at the London docks.' His voice shook the place, and each man acted as came best. Some made a jest and laughed; others laughed, but not so easily; and some turned pale and asked him what he meant. But he said no more. Just for a moment his careless eyes ran round the place, like lightning dancing upon steel; and it was then, in a sudden second, that I felt his gaze on me. It was but a flash, but he saw my hand go to my pillow, as I sat up; he saw my thought show in my eyes. The next day he came to me as I leant

over the ship's side, and talked to me in my own language — "

"And told you things — heaps of things?" Anna's knife was suspended in the air.

"How do you know?"

"Oh!" She tossed back her plait. "It is a trick of White's. Your Austrian was in league with White; he saw through you like you see through a pane of glass. He scared you and warned you, and then he offered to steer you safe to his own house. Is n't that right?"

Johann hung his head.

"Oh, Johann, Johann — and you went!"

He was still for a moment; then he spoke. "Herr Golstock was right. I never had the brains."

But Anna waved him on. "The end?" she said. "The end?"

"Oh, the end — the end is a blur. It was after supper at the Austrian's house; I was in my room, polishing the jewels. They broke in on me — three men with heavy faces and shuffling feet. They stood for a moment staring at me; then one came straight across the room and struck me on the head. I heard the jewels rattle on the table; I saw them pounce on them like cats; then all my fear rose up, — choking me. My hand shut without my will on the one ornament I still held; and as the first man raised his hand to strike again, I fled out of the room. How I slipped past them I cannot say, I suppose the dazzle of the stones was in their eyes, but I tumbled

down the stairs and reached the street. In the street there were people — many people, and I fell into their midst — " He stopped to catch his breath.

"Go on! Go on!" Anna's eyes flashed.

"I fell in amongst them, my head was swinging round; then sharply, from behind me, I heard the Austrian's voice with your English cry of 'Stop thief!' And it seemed to me that everyone — I most of all — began to run. It was then that I found you." He suddenly collapsed.

There was a tense moment; then Anna let the fish fall and ran to him, holding out her hands.

PART ONE—CHAPTER VI

ANNA took his hand and stroked it gently. "Poor Johann! Poor Johann!" she said, punctuating the words with little motions of her fingers. She felt that there were things to say, but they slipped her grasp. His story still rang in her ears, making dull echoes; and she watched him with eyes half incredulous, half envious of the adventure he had known.

He was lying back with closed lids and lashes that twitched with the drawing of his breath. His pallid face looked thin; and frequently, in the years that followed, the isolation of his attitude in that moment came back to her like the vaguely recalled section of a dream. Time seemed to halt while he sat there; she counted four carts pass over the cobbles of the street, then her patience broke away; she pressed his hand sharply, and he sat up.

"Oh," he moaned, "it was terrible — terrible!"

His voice sank, and he fell back again. But Anna was on the alert; with a swift movement she dropped to her knees and looked up into his face. For a moment the spirit in her eyes inspired him; he raised himself and sat forward in the chair. "I told you that I was a coward. Look!" He held out

his hand till the sun played on it; she saw that it shook.

"But, Johann —"

His eyes turned on her, full of question and doubt.

"Johann, I want to understand." She rose and moved slowly to the fire. Her tone lingered in a puzzled way and her brows were knit in a frown. "You have lost the jewels — that's terrible, of course; but it's not so bad as you say. You'll go to this man in Vienna —" Her voice suddenly stopped, broken in on by a laugh — a laugh as hard and mirthless as a crash of stones.

"Go back to Vienna!" The voice was as shrill as the laugh. "Go back to Vienna! It would make the dead turn in the grave." All at once he saw her face, and his own changed. "Oh, Fräulein, I have hurt you. It was the irony and the fear together. Fräulein, forgive —"

But Anna's back was turned. "It is n't a hundred years ago," she said coldly, "when a man could kill you — or torture you."

"True! It is not a hundred years ago."

"Then you are a coward." Her tone was short and contemptuous.

There was a long pause, so long that she was compelled at last to turn round; she turned slowly, then halted with a throb of contrition.

He still sat forward, but his face was humbly bent; his eyes, pained and wistful, were fixed on her with a concentrated gaze; as their glances met, he spoke.

"I am as I was made," he said gently. "I could be faithful; I think I could love well; but in my own cause I shall always be a coward. Nature was looking out of the window when I was born." He added the last with a twist in his thin voice.

Anna laughed, but there was a catch in her laughter. She came behind him and touched his hair. "I was a wretch! But I am sorry. Will that do?"

"It was true — what you said."

"It was not. It was hateful. Let's start again where I got cross. I said you must go to Vienna; you said it was impossible. Now why?"

"Because it is impossible. Impossible." There was a nervous whiteness round his mouth.

"But why?"

"Because I am afraid. I know men cannot kill — but there are other things besides killing. He would vent his loss on me in other ways. Oh, not for all the value of the stones would I go back." He grasped the arms of his chair.

Anna paused undecided; then all at once a generous impulse crossed her face; she walked swiftly round the chair and stood in front of him. "Then don't bother any more," she said. "If you are afraid to go, don't go. Stay here with us." She bent, looking straightly in his eyes. "No one will find you here; this place is like a mouse-hole in the bigness of London; you will be as safe as — a mouse." She laughed; then grew grave again. "There's

a room waiting to be used; there 's father growing more forgetful every day; there 's the shop wanting more care. Oh, you would n't be an idler — I can promise you that." She held out her hand.

He took it unsteadily, then let it drop. "One thing prevents."

"Johann!" Her voice fell.

He rose abruptly, thrust his hand inside his shirt, and held something to the light.

"Johann!" she said again, but in an altered voice. The object in his hand shone with a peculiar pinkish glow. "Oh, Johann, it 's very, very fine!"

"If I were to stay," he said suddenly, "this would burn into me — little at first, greater afterwards — until, to myself, I became a thief." He turned his eyes from the jewel to her face, from her face back again. "What can I do with it? What am I to do?"

She was silent for a space, then she glanced up. "There are two places that it can go to. Back to Vienna," Johann shivered, "or to the place in London where the others should have gone. Is n't that right?"

He cowered again. "Oh, but I dare not. I dare not!"

"There is the post."

"No, no. Packets are traced; letters are traced." He moved uneasily about the room.

Anna knelt on the wooden chair — her elbows resting on the back. "Johann," she said.

He turned to her.

"You trust me, don't you?"

His eyes were eloquent.

"Say it in words."

"I trust you!"

"That 's right! Now listen. I 'll take your jewel to the house where the others should have gone."

"Anna!"

"Yes. Don't say anything. I 'll take it." Her voice quickened; she suddenly knelt up. "Johann, say that I can go?" The strength of her anticipation flashed across her eyes; the force of her excitement passed unconsciously to the man. He moved towards her, his face lighted by a new hope.

"It would mean peace?" he said.

"Yes, 't would mean peace." She grasped at the word. "'T would mean peace for you, Johann, and — and who knows what for me?" She laughed afresh and leant towards him. "Say 'I trust you!' again."

He moved awkwardly to the dresser and touched the plates as he had done before; then he turned. "I trust you! And — and I can never forget."

PART ONE—CHAPTER VII

COUNTING by human grades, the journey from the southeast to the west of London is longer than the crossing of the desert. To Anna it was the momentous undertaking of her life. Pursued part of the way on foot and part by omnibus, it held her spell-bound with interest and delight.

First came the by-ways, the intricate streets with their jutting houses that had been familiar to her all her life; then the gradually widening thoroughfares, the warehouses, the atmosphere of steady commerce, the sense of colossal enterprise; lastly, after many intermediate phases, hundreds of graduating shades, the West End itself—the throngs of people, the glitter of shops, the colour and movement and exhilaration, the surface suggestion of life without a care, so novel to one bred in the ways of toil. It fascinated and drew her forcibly; for a time it caused her to forget her errand and to loiter in the crowd, as, dismounting from one omnibus, she waited for the next that was to take her on her way. But the defection was only momentary; with a little gasp she recognised her conveyance, tightened her fingers round the small linen bag she carried in

her hand, and an instant later was hauled on to the step by an irritated conductor.

Seated on the top of the omnibus, her interests became personal again: blurring her eyes, she let her thoughts steep themselves in consideration of what was still to come. For ten minutes the day-dream lasted; then her gaze concentrated and with a sting of reality she came back to facts. On one hand, as the horses carried her soberly forward, lay the park, stretching away in illimitable stillness, the cropped grass still green, the bare tree-trunks, black and mysterious against a background of fog; on the other, the tall, irregular houses with their aloofness, their air of subdued well-being. The whole struck on her with the suddenness of unreckoned-with things; the sense of a world widely separate from her own fell on her with force. She leant forward agitatedly and touched the driver's arm.

"Put me down at Palace Court." The sound of her own voice disconcerted her afresh.

The man nodded, and it seemed that the harness jingled louder as they swung steadily along. She wondered why anything so common as a 'bus was allowed to pass that way. After two minutes' wait she leant out again.

"Is it near?"

He pointed with his whip, and all at once her breath seemed to leave her throat. A moment later the horses were pulled up; she rose, her heart beating violently, her hand grasping the little bag, and

descended the steps with headlong speed. Almost before she was aware, she was standing alone in the roadway, watching the omnibus lurch placidly out of sight. Then she walked to the foot-path and considered her next act.

She drew a slip of paper from her pocket, read it carefully and glanced at the indicated house; then quite slowly her gaze travelled to her dress of coarse brown serge, and she became alive to the strongest temptation that had assailed her yet — the temptation to run away. The inclination was so compelling that she turned involuntarily and walked for a couple of yards; then the face of Johann, pale and nervous, rose before her, and she stood very still. It was a trust! She turned back; her steps dragged but did not swerve, she reached the house without a halt; there, setting her lips, she followed the advice on the unfamiliar bell — and pressed.

Far inside the house she heard a whizzing sound, and as she waited a lightness stole through her, a fresh sense of nervous anticipation that was entirely new. The time seemed interminable; then at last the door swung softly back and she turned round. A manservant was gazing at her with inquisitive eyes.

The contact with a human presence braced her; the trepidation vanished and her courage came creeping back.

"Does Mrs. Maxtead live here?" she asked. Her glance was level and direct; but the man seemed lost

in his scrutiny and she lifted her head. "Please be quick!" she added. "I have no time to waste."

He eyed her while he prepared a retort; then he smiled. "Time must be valuable where you come from," he said.

The blood flew to her face and her lip trembled. "It is," she said, after a pause. "There servants have no time to speak; they have only time to work. Tell Mrs. Maxtead I want to see her. Tell her at once." Her voice rose.

For a second the man's dignity choked him; then he subdued it. "Mrs. Maxtead is not at home."

Anna's lips parted, but quite as swiftly they closed again; and at the same instant the man straightened himself. From behind a curtain on the right of the hall came the sound of a bell, imperatively rung.

"Stand in for a minute," he said; "and keep on the mat." He glanced doubtfully at her boots; then swiftly shutting the hall door, he turned and disappeared behind the curtain.

For Anna there followed a difficult moment, a moment in which she hung between a desire to cry and a fresh longing to turn and fly. Then swiftly — as such things occasionally occur — she forgot her impulses, forgot her own existence even, in the sudden fascination of something quite apart. From behind the curtain came the sound of a voice — the first cultured woman's voice she had ever heard — and strong as a flame her power of appreciation sprang into life. She stood breathless, attentive to every word.

"Who is it, Branks? Someone for me?" The voice was like water rippling under moss.

"A young woman, ma'am." The alteration in the man's tone was notable. For the first time Anna realised the gulf of class.

"What does she want? What does she say?"

"That she must see you, ma'am; she says nothing more."

The owner of the voice laughed — a cool, well-bred laugh. "You must make her say."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Branks — wait!" The voice seemed to linger and hesitate. "Is she — a common person?"

Anna drew back a step; for a second she hung in dire suspense. Then Branks replied.

"Well, ma'am —" He considered. "Her clothes are shabby; but she has a way — if I might say it, ma'am, a domineering-ordering way."

"Ah?" The inflection was very faint. "You may show her in. Yes — in here; I 'll see her here. One's curiosity is so seldom touched."

"Yes, ma'am." Branks deferentially withdrew.

In the hall he turned to Anna; she noticed that he still held himself very straight.

"You may follow me," he said, and his voice sounded pompous and aggrieved. A second later, with the clatter of brass rings, he drew the curtain back.

PART ONE—CHAPTER VIII

IN the room there was a toning of rose and mauve; a toning that reminded Anna of John Desinski, and the colour schemes over which he used to rave in the attic above the shop. It was an instinctive remembrance, but instinctively it linked this other life with hers; and unconsciously she found the balance of incidents as she passed through the door.

A small table was drawn luxuriously near the fire, and the suggestion of lunch was still visible in the disorder of silver and glass. The occupant of the room raised her head, and disappointment was the first feeling that sped through Anna's mind. The beautiful voice did not belong to a beautiful face. She paused almost disconcerted; then a second expression, the stealing of a fresh impression crossed her eyes, and she moved on again.

The owner of the voice looked up. "You must n't hesitate," she said. "I have finished my lunch—quite." She pushed back her chair and laid down the book that she was holding. She was a woman of thirty with dark hair and delicate skin, but with eyes that were almost unfeminine in their restless glance. A woman devoid of good looks, but with a personal-

ity and a distinction that were magnetic — a woman who need never fear a crowd.

Without understanding, Anna felt something of this. She moved forward mechanically, studying the face before her line by line; at last she rested her hand on the edge of the table and spoke.

"It's quite wonderful," she said thoughtfully, "how you suit your voice. If you'd been pretty you wouldn't have suited it half so well — not half so well."

Mrs. Maxtead stared; then she laughed. "Branks was correct," she said, looking at the girl. "You certainly have — a way. Where in the world do you come from? I thought they had ceased to manufacture in the original, nowadays."

Anna blushed, then moved uncertainly. "You mustn't ask me that," she said. "I have promised, at least —" She stumbled at the words. "My father came from Russia, years ago, if that is what you mean," she added in a courteous afterthought.

The other laughed again, and a faint irony underran the softness of the sound; a tone that caught one up with a sting of interest at its start and lulled one into forgetfulness at its fall; a curious effect of salt and sweet that tingled the senses into activity and left them anxious for what was yet to come.

"I thought it wasn't quite the English type," she said slowly. "The English type has such a tendency

to knock at doors. Now you would never knock at a door — if you wanted to get in?"

Anna considered. "I think it would depend," she said truthfully. "If it were a man's door, I think I should knock."

Mrs. Maxtead lay back in her chair. "You irresistible child! Come and have some coffee? I could sit and ask you things for hours."

Anna moved, then paused. "But — " she began, "but — "

"My dear child, there is no such word. Come! The coffee is quite hot; and there are years in which to tell me what you want." She drew forward a low stool with a brocaded cushion and set it beside her chair. "This ought to suit you — you have the seeing eyes." She smiled. "You should sit low down in front of a fire with your hands about your knees, and see castles and dream dreams. You do it, I know."

A slight wonder spread over Anna's face. "Don't you — see pictures?" she asked.

"I! My dear child, I find too many things to see in life. I might gaze into the fire for minutes, but I'd only calculate the amount of cinders my coal merchant makes his profit by. I am hopelessly commercial, you see — to the finger-tips." She laughed and spread her hands to the blaze. They were perfect in shape, but, like all that surrounded her, they gave their own peculiar sense of fineness underlaid by steel. The impression was distinct; it gave Anna a

little thrill, and sent the recollection of her errand flashing back upon her with double force. She took the proffered seat, then resolutely looked up into her companion's face.

"Mrs. Maxtead," she said; then she waited, for there was an uncontrollable tremor in her voice. It was well enough to rehearse the scene in the raw air or in the dust and shadow of the shop, but its reality was disconcerting. She had made no allowance for a listener with a manner perfectly even, perfectly and coolly sweet, but with eyes that seemed to run through the mind and pigeonhole the thoughts before they could spring to words. It was more than disconcerting. She squeezed the little bag hidden in the palm of her hand and made a new start.

"You are expecting jewels from Vienna — pink topaz jewels with pearl and diamond rims." She stopped. The plunge was taken and she felt like the swimmer who, rising to the top of the water, shakes the spray from his eyes and looks about. She looked round, wondering how big the splash had been.

Mrs. Maxtead was looking at her; her eyes were narrowed and glittering with interest, but her face was quite unmoved.

"Yes?" she said in ever so still a voice; then she paused.

Anna found the pause more difficult than the word. She pushed back her stool and rose.

"Well," she said hurriedly, "you will never get

those stones — they have been stolen — they are gone." She drew a gasping breath; she felt as though someone must strike her — a curious sensation that caused her to draw back a step and half raise her hand.

But Mrs. Maxtead was unmoved. "Well?" she said as quietly as before.

Anna looked desperately round: in the atmosphere of tense calm she felt that she was losing hold. "You must n't ask me any questions," she cried; "you must n't ask me a thing — not a thing. I can only tell you the stones are gone; that they 've been stolen — all of them but one, and that one — "

Mrs. Maxtead's position never altered, but her eyes concentrated into a question, and the fingers that held her coffee-cup looked stiff where their pressure showed. She reminded Anna of a stealthily watchful cat.

"You must think me a very silly woman," she said. "Do you know that I am twice your age?"

Anna clasped her hands. "I have n't thought of — of anything," she said. "I only know that you will never see any of your jewels except — except this one that I have brought you back." Her face was scarlet with excitement; she tried to open the little bag, but her hands shook. "It came to me — I cannot tell you how; and 't was my duty — 't was my duty to bring it back." Her voice as well as her fingers were shaking. Her companion's eyes were on her face.

"Who told you where to bring it?" The voice was like the crisp breaking of ice.

"I cannot tell you that."

"Suppose I were to compel you?"

"You could n't compel me." Anna looked up.

"I don't know. There are some very efficient ways."

Anna suddenly raised her head, and at the same instant the string of the bag came undone. "No one could make me say," she said. "I think you know that as well — as well as if you were me." The look in her eyes was not a common look, her voice was fearless and clear. With a swift movement she tore the clasp from its covering and held it out. "Take it!" she said.

Still Mrs. Maxtead was immovable, not even her eyelids stirred. She was watching the girl with a quiet, alert gaze.

"Why don't you look at it? Why don't you take it?"

"Because I am thinking of something else."

Anna threw the clasp upon the table. "Well, I 've done it. I can go now." She walked to the door.

"Wait for a minute." The voice was essentially persuasive. The girl paused. "Would you like to know what my thought was?"

"No."

"Are you quite sure?"

She turned. "I 'd like to know why you pretended not to see the clasp."

"It was not pretence."

"Then what?"

"I saw something that interested me more."

Anna moved away again. "You are laughing," she said.

"Yes — at myself." The woman raised her brilliant eyes and opened them wide. "I have lost — or you tell me I have lost — a present worth hundreds of pounds. Being a woman, I should go into hysterics, instead of which, contrary to all traditions, I feel a new interest and a new energy flowing through me by quite a new gate. I see possibilities and I want to grasp them. You don't understand? Of course you don't. They are all wrapped up in haze like the rising sun." She laughed and moved forward, her voice as soft as the rustle of her dress. "You have shown me more than the jewel," she said, "a good deal more, and you have made me greedy to increase my knowledge. I wonder whether you would come to me again — if I were to ask?" She laid her hands with their firm pressure on the girl's arm. "Come and see me again?" She raised her eyebrows in question and smiled.

For a moment Anna's pride wavered. She looked across the room at the costly furniture, then down at her hostess's dress; then at last she raised her eyes. "I think I'd love to come," she said.

"And you are not too angry to shake hands?"

"I'm not vexed at all — now." Her fingers re-

turned the other's pressure. "I shall come — whenever you like."

"Say this day next week?"

"This day next week." Like a dream she saw the curtain swing back, and like a dream she saw Branks open the hall door; then the cool, keen air blew across her face, whipping back the recollection of herself.

Inside the room of pink lights and mauve shadows, Mrs. Maxtead moved to and fro. Before the hall door had closed her hand was on the bell; a moment later Branks was in the room.

"Where is Céleste?" she asked.

"In your room, ma'am." It was only on occasion that Branks heard the ring, resembling the ring of steel, in his mistress's voice, but he knew it well enough to be swift in his response.

"Let her put on her hat, and send her to me here."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And, Branks — remember there is always time for gossip later on."

"Yes, ma'am." Branks retired.

Twice Mrs. Maxtead walked from the fire to the window and back again; her glance flitted from place to place; her fingers seemed trembling to act. At last she stopped by the over mantel.

"It is a look in itself," she said suddenly and aloud; "a look quite in itself. This man has it —" She

picked up a photograph and studied it intently; it was the picture of a musician who had made the whole world turn round. "Catrina Lotz had it; Leone Perez had it; and it was in the girl's eyes as she threw up her head — I 'm sure it was. It is inspiration — whatever its output, whatever its groove." She pressed her finger-tips excitedly on the mantelshelf. "Inspiration!" she said below her breath. "The one thing to set a match to the world — the one thing that really lights." Her hands dropped to her sides.

"Ah, Céleste!" she said, as she turned round.

PART ONE—CHAPTER IX

IT was late afternoon when Anna entered the shop. Johann looked up, the duster in his hand fell to the ground, and he leant back against the counter.

"Well?" he said.

She walked up to him, took off her hat and threw it into a corner; then sprang on to the counter and sat swinging her feet. The dusk had fallen heavily, and the ill-smelling oil lamp had not yet been lit; only the tiny candle in Solny's office shed a wavering gleam. Her face was in full shadow, but even in the shadow Johann felt the light that her presence made —the inimitable flash of youth and exhilaration that no after time can reproduce. Instinctively he hung his head.

There followed a full, momentous pause which the scratching of old Solny's pen inadequately filled. At last she leant forward and laying her hands on his shoulders, turned his face slowly round to hers. "Johann," she whispered rapturously, "I have seen it! Think of it—I have seen it at last!" She swayed back and forward, little gasps of delighted laughter slipping in between her words. "Oh, Johann! Johann!"

He drew back. "Seen what?" His voice was timorously low.

"Why, life, of course! Life!" She shook him a little, then looked away into the darkness over his head. "Oh, Johann, but it is fine! They have silver dishes to eat from, and carpets like moss; and — and everything that is n't glittery is silk —" She stopped to catch her breath.

"Yes — and the clasp?"

She laughed. "The clasp. Why, she has rings that flash like twenty clasps." She dismissed the subject summarily and returned to her train of thought. "She gave me coffee in little gilded cups that father would have died of envy for; she made me sit on an inlaid stool, and — oh, Johann, it was too lovely! It was too lovely!" She clasped her hands. "I ran most of the way home. It was too wonderful to sit quite still."

There was a fresh wait, then Johann spoke dully. "I shall light the lamp," he said.

"The lamp! Oh, Johann, no. It makes the place so stuffy, and I burn. Feel!" She raised one of his hands and put it against her cheek. "Let 's sit here in the dark — and talk?"

He made no response.

"Johann."

"Yes."

"You are silent — or sad. Johann!" She slipped to the ground. "You don't ask things. You are n't excited a bit; you are n't glad." Her voice fell.

But the silence continued.

"Tell me what it is."

"It is nothing — nothing — " He moved away from her. Somewhere in his heart there was a dread — a dread in whose shadow his own inefficiency, his own pitiable terrors became very dwarfed. "I am stupid," he said below his breath. "I do not know what to ask. I would ask — I would ask, if I knew." He turned again abruptly, trying to see her face.

But she missed his mood. When one is young it is hard to be anything beside; youth is all-embracing in its demands. The whole world to her eyes was a blur of rose and mauve. She laid her hands on his shoulders again and laughed.

"You dear stupid thing!" she said. "You dear stupid thing! How I 'd like to wake you up! You are dull to-night, and I could sing and run and be mad — the world is so good."

"The world is a child's puzzle," he said sadly, "it has two sides."

She caught him up swiftly. "If it has two sides, then we can turn up which we like; you have defeated yourself!" She laughed again. She was like a young horse set loose in a wide field; there was a space in things that she had not realised before. Her exuberance of spirit rose up, demanding vent. "Oh, Johann," she cried, "it is more splendid than I ever dreamt. When I was little, I fancied that this street was the whole world — that there was nothing else beyond. Then one day, John

Desinski took me with him into the city and I understood. I was very little then, but nothing frightened me — not the cabs nor the horses nor the crowds. I only wanted to drive the horses for myself; to grow up quickly and be one of the people who jostled and pushed. To-night it 's the same!" Her voice lifted and fell with her words; Johann's visionary shadow dropped on him again. He jerked his shoulders from her touch and walked away.

For an instant she swayed in his direction, then some remembrance of the day struck her still again, and she stayed motionless with widely opened eyes. The dim shop became a palace from which at any moment the mysterious veil might lift, her father's pen the quill of some recording deity, and Johann — poor, deformed Johann — no more than the spectre outside the gates. She stood immovable, wrapped within herself.

Five minutes drew slowly out, then Johann crept back to her again and touched her hand. His presence came with a jerk; she drew back, then laughed.

"Johann, you frightened me! You crawl so in the dark."

He murmured inaudibly, then raised his voice, "Anna, I have been wondering — "

"What?"

He shuffled with his feet. "I have been thinking — wondering — " He halted. "It never comes to you that you will leave the shop one day?"

She peered at him through the gloom. "Why do you ask such silly things?" Six hours before she would have answered his question with a laugh, now she halted over her reply. To herself the hesitation passed unseen, but it gripped at Johann's heart. He broke headlong in upon her words.

"I was foolish, Anna; it was the sadness of the dusk. It was the thought of your — your brightness and the other thought. Forget that I spoke." He made a strenuous attempt to laugh.

But Anna was silent; when she spoke again her voice was tentative and still. "Johann," she said very softly, "do you really think that I could forget that father is quite old — that the shop — that you —" She stopped, and there was a question in her attitude as she leant towards him. Then abruptly and characteristically she lifted her head and sprang back to her former seat. "Johann," she cried, "you are right — quite right! One does grow silly in the dark. Light the lamp!"

PART ONE — CHAPTER X

IT was seven days later. Mrs. Maxtead was standing by the mantelpiece when the curtain was drawn back and Anna, smiling and radiant, walked into the room. She watched her enter with an expression that was impossible to read; her eyes were cold and bright; in her hand she held the musician's photograph. She laid the picture in its place, then she smiled and put out her hand.

"I had almost begun to wonder whether you would come — though your voice should have made me know."

"My voice?" Anna took the extended hand.

"Yes. You are original enough to have a candid voice. But you are cold. Come to the fire." With perfect graciousness she continued to hold the girl's hand — drawing her gently closer, till they stood side by side.

"Now warm yourself. Is it snowing again? I never look through windows in winter time."

Anna did not answer. She was noting little changes, storing material for future dreams. She saw with a pang, half pain, half admiration, that her hostess wore a different and more elaborate dress;

she noticed that books and flowers had both been changed, and that a deep settee had taken the place of the luncheon-table before the fire. It was quite a minute before she raised her eyes.

"I wonder why you care to have me," she said at length.

For an instant their glances met, and they studied each other with that look so peculiar to the moment and to their sex. The first acquaintance of women resembles a shooting plant. The bare bough is rife with promise; from its brownness may spring flowers or thorns, according as the sun shines or the wind cuts; but for the moment — the all-pervading moment — it is a bare bough and nothing more. They watched each other for a moment; then the elder shook things into their groove with a laugh.

"We shall be friends," she said. "I have an instinct that is never quite astray." Her eyes continued to rest on the girl's face, but their glance softened and deepened in a way that was more eloquent than sound.

Anna, who was usually restive under flattery, responded to the look as to a ray of warmth. "You are kind," she said suddenly; "as kind as you are — clever." There was a ring of admiration on the final word.

"Clever!" The other laughed. "My dear child, how much you have to learn!" She dropped the hand that she was holding and moved away; then she turned again, a new expression on her face. She

had the invaluable gift of choosing the moment: with her, confidence was ever a bid for something higher — rarely a futile one. She chose her words now with a critical perception of her listener's mind — chose them slowly, with infinite care. "My dear little girl," she said, "there are two classes of people in the world — the people who are clever, and the people who are keen — and you must never mix the two; they meet and touch, they are necessary to each other, but they never, never blend. Sit down! You will be tired." Her voice changed on a new sentence with extreme rapidity, though never encroaching on the principle of her theme. She gave Anna one of her sudden smiles, then turned again to the fire, her glance straying restlessly from the burning logs to the toe of her slipper as it rested on the fender.

"It is just four years since I sorted my capacities and classed myself. Some people find the process difficult; it came rather easily to me."

Anna looked up from the settee. She was vividly enthralled and feared to break the enchantment even by a breath. She was raised to an altitude where the air was difficult and rarefied, where she scarcely acknowledged her own being.

Mrs. Maxtead, gazing abstractedly into the overmantel mirror, studied the excited face and smiled cautiously. When she spoke again, there was a faintly deprecating tone running with her words.

"I was twenty-five when my husband died, leaving

me with hundreds of acquaintances and a thousand pounds a year." She stopped again, and picking up the photograph that she had touched before, made it a screen to shield her face. "Now with a thousand pounds a year one is barely rich enough to have desires." She turned with an ironical glance.

Anna looked up dreamily. She followed the sense of the words vaguely, as one follows the story of an opera. It was the necessary adjunct to the magnetic voice, as the argument is the immaterial adjunct to the music. It gave her the opportunity to listen.

"Please talk on," she said.

Mrs. Maxtead laid down the photograph as she had done before, and crossed to the girl's side. "It is very seldom that I talk about myself," she said, "because it is very rarely that I wish to be understood." She sank on the settee and took one of Anna's hands, stroking it evenly till her rings made a swerve of light. Her touch as well as her voice possessed a magnetic thrill.

"It was then that I stood up straight and looked about. I had to make my one thousand into four, so I had to know myself."

Anna waited, watching the strong, supple fingers caress her own.

"What do you guess that I discovered?"

Anna shook her head.

"I discovered that I had a capacity all my own."

She rose again. Her restlessness was indomitable, something she had never quite subdued. She crossed to a table and picking up an unread book, began to cut the leaves. "It was a capacity —" She used the paper-knife with little jerks. "A capacity for exploiting clever people, while never claiming cleverness for myself. It is a track few people have followed, because few people are really wise. It sounds second hand, but it is not. It has a fund of excitement that one can never plumb. It is almost sport!" She moved back again and stood with her back to the fire. Then she laughed.

"I flatter myself that my position in life is quite unique. In four years I have helped quite thirty people to tolerable success, and without making one obligation or sapping one independence. I have never offended a woman, because I have studied how to take a second place with grace; and I have kept every man friend I ever made by the simple means of never expecting — and never allowing him to make love." She paused and touched her dark hair with a peculiar gesture, a gesture that was like a fine comparison or a neatly made point. Then she smiled once more and pressed the bell. "How I have talked," she said in a lowered voice. "My throat feels like dry sand."

Branks had brought in the tea, replenished the fire, and disappeared again before either spoke.

Then it was Anna who broke the pause; her eyes were filled with thoughtful shadows, her mouth was grave.

"What do you mean by exploit?" she asked, as she crossed the room to fetch her cup. "No. No cream, please."

"I know; I provided a lemon on purpose to seem Russian; I want you to think that my memory is good. To exploit a person is to do for them what they are too lazy or too incapable to do for themselves; to run them, if you know what running means. There is young Anton Golstock, for example. Hot cakes or cold?"

Anna's cup became unsteady for a moment. She took a tiny cake.

"There is Anton Golstock, a clever boy — nephew to old Golstock of Vienna, who adores him. Well, he has talent as certainly as his uncle had money, but neither talent nor money can do quite everything — though foolish people think they can. There were some particular doors that Anton was keen to open, and it happened that I possessed the keys. It was all very simple, and those jewels you spoke of the other day were the logical result. If one were bitter, one might call them the oil for the locks; but bitterness is such an unqualified mistake." She ate a biscuit critically and sipped her tea; then she looked at Anna with a swift, satirical smile. "Well," she said, "what have you deduced?" Her tone was light, but her eyes flashed over the girl's face.

Anna stared into the fire. At last she spoke.

"I think as I thought at first."

"And that is — "

The girl lifted her eyes. "That you are the cleverest person I know."

PART ONE—CHAPTER XI

AFTER Anna's pronouncement there was a lengthy pause. To the girl it was an immaterial one, for the atmosphere that surrounded her — the warmth of the room, the sense of autumnal flowers — was sufficient to fill any space; but to her companion it held a meaning that ran below the surface and interwove itself with facts, as the pattern in the loom weaves through, imprinting itself upon the silk. It was a moment of appreciation so spontaneous and sincere that she accepted it instinctively, forgetting to look ironically for the hidden motive power.

All new sensations are quieting for their own duration. Mrs. Maxtead sat still for a space of time; her fingers toyed with her teacup, then with her spoon; her hazel eyes alternately lightened and deepened with the procession of her thoughts. At last the silver clock by her hand struck five, and the necessity for action came leaping back. With a slight movement of her shoulders she became her habitual self — alert, critical, keen. She ceased to move her fingers; her lips parted for speech, but closed again. Then she rose.

She rose softly; her motions slight, as the rustle of a leaf. For an instant Anna turned and looked at

her, then returned to her watching of the fire. She crossed to the piano, her movements so gentle as to suggest stealth ; then, still silently, she seated herself, and her fingers passed in mute thought across the keys. Then with sudden resolution she began to play.

Anna stirred, leant forward questioningly, then dropped back again.

The piece was the "Storm Prelude" of Chopin. Why she chose the theme it would be difficult to say, though from every act of hers ran a thread of reason, whose shuttle sometimes floated on the surface of facts, sometimes hung vaguely in their midst, and sometimes lay at the bottom, inscrutable and unseen. The first faintly repeated note fell on the silence almost casually, as the first action in a great series of events might fall. One felt that there was mastery if not genius in the player's touch — in the strength of her fingers, in the poise of the sound.

In complete silence, with one motionless listener, the music went on and on. The soft toning of the room melted into firelight — the fireglow of deep shadows and coloured lights. Beside the piano the tall chrysanthemum plants stood boldly up, their soft leaves a mere suggestion, their massed blooms a blot of pink, their scent, pungent and reminiscent, mingling in the air. The player's eyes fell separately and critically upon every detail ; then, with a perfect evenness of glance, they ran the polished length of the piano and paused on the listener's face — show-

ing clear against the background of the settee. They rested on it long and studiously, passing from the curve of the hair and the sweep of the thick eyelashes to the generous, impulsive lips. And all the while the music swelled and grew, with no suggestion lost, no point missed, the chords crashing and merging, the compelling motive growing dominant with every repeated note.

It was a fine moment. The player's eyes were cold, questioning, and bright, her fingers unerring. The sounds cut the silence into pain, the pathos and loss seemed to beat together; then, with consummate effect, breaking upon the repeated note, came silence — the silence that only such a pause can be. The player's hands dropped quietly to her sides, but her eyes did not swerve.

Anna caught her breath uneasily and turned round.

"What 's that?" she said. "What 's it called?"

Mrs. Maxtead leant forward; her figure was observant in every line.

"Come here!" she said.

Anna rose and crossed the room.

There was a silver match-box on the piano. Mrs. Maxtead put out her hand, quietly picked it up and struck a match.

The momentary light shot up and the girl's face was illumined — the whiteness of her teeth between the parted lips, the suddenly narrowed pupils of the eyes. Mrs. Maxtead looked swiftly from one to the other, then blew on the flame and dropped the match.

"Ah, well," she said; "there are more roads to Rome than one."

Anna stared. "I don't understand."

"Did I expect you to understand?" She rose and laid her hand on the girl's arm. "Now I am going to ask for a concession. I want to hear your name." She pressed the arm she held. "I must call you something, or — how can we be friends?"

"My name is Anna." The girl raised her eyes.

"Anna — that means graciousness."

Anna was silent.

"And what comes afterwards? You can surely trust me such a little way?"

The girl counted the leaves on one chrysanthemum plant while she made her decision; then for the second time she lifted her eyes.

"I think you have the right to ask. It is Anna Solny. My father was Nicholas Solnikoff, but he dropped the ending when the persecution came. He says that in England it is wiser to be brief."

Mrs. Maxtead smiled. "A philosopher! And a Jew, eh?"

Anna nodded.

"A Russian Jew!" She ceased to smile and once more glanced in the direction of the fire. "A Russian Jew!" she said again. "There has n't been an inspired Russian Jew since — " She broke off and looked up. "Do you know the history of your race?"

Anna took a step back. "No. My father never

speaks of his religion — or of his people ; he says that he has suffered too much for both. He says that God is for everyone to find with his own lamp. He is a strange man — my father." She stopped.

There was an interval. Mrs. Maxtead continued to look towards the glowing coals; Anna stood motionless. At last the former broke the silence.

"A Russian Jew!" she said again. Then she turned, her manner changed. "Do you know that this father of yours, with his philosophies, his theories, his strangeness, may have gone critically near to making a career — to being a great teacher or a great leader? Do you know that suppressed races burst out at intervals, like volcanoes, in a flash of flame — a flash of genius? You must study your people — you must know your race."

For a moment the cold voice was warmed. To Anna it seemed as if silver had suddenly melted into gold ; her hesitancy fell from her ; she stepped to the other's side.

"When you talk like that," she said simply, "you make me see pictures — like the pictures in the fire." She spoke earnestly, with the earnestness of a child.

When Mrs. Maxtead responded, her tone, her very gestures, were carefully ruled. "You are very good to my voice," she said. "Some day it must move you to greater things than a fire could do." She laughed gently and drew the girl across the room; by the mantelpiece she released her arm and sank on to the settee. "As for those pictures." She sat up

and touched Anna's waist. "Tell me what they look like. Tell me what you do with them when they are made." Insensibly her touch tightened; she drew the girl lower and nearer till they sat side by side; then once more she took the hand she had been holding, and stroked it — every motion accompanying a word.

"Everyone who makes a dream," she said, "puts his dream into an act — or wishes to. That man with the curious mouth — " She nodded towards the picture on the mantel-shelf. "That man puts his dreams into the bow of his violin and draws them out into realities for thousands and thousands of ears. Others — " She spoke slowly, tentatively. "Others put theirs into colours and mediums, and make big spaces of canvas into living things — " She paused keenly, and glanced for the twentieth time at the girl's face.

Anna's hand tightened on hers, but the glance that responded to her words was not the glance that she waited for.

"Oh, I know," cried the girl. "John Desinski made his dreams like that."

"John Desinski!" Mrs. Maxtead quietly dropped the hand. "Who was John Desinski?"

"He was an artist — a Polish artist." Anna spoke dreamily with a ring of memory in her voice. "Quite poor — but with so much hope. He was an exile, like my father; and my father gave him shelter. He had nothing but his canvases and tubes, but he used to sing the whole day long as he worked in the attic

room. And when I took him up his meals — for sometimes he 'd forget to eat — he 'd put down his palette and catch my hands, swinging them to and fro; and he 'd speak with tears and laughter mixing in his voice. 'Ah, little Anna!' he used to say. 'Little Anna! When my ships come home!' But then his voice would break off short and he 'd cough, while the colour rushed into his face. 'T was always the same. How well I remember! But he died five years ago." Her tone dropped. "He died before he painted the great picture that was to bring fortune to us all. It was very sad."

Mrs. Maxtead shivered. "Don't talk of death," she said; "it is the one inevitable that I refuse to reckon with." She took the girl's hand again. "So he painted pictures? And what did you do while the pictures were being made?"

Anna looked up with an involuntary smile. "Cleaned the palette," she said, "and sometimes the palette knife!"

"Never got to brushes?"

She shook her head.

Mrs. Maxtead pressed the hand that she was holding.

"Then your dreams do not materialise through sticky mediums and oily tubes?" Her tone was light, but the half-intense, half-ironic question that underran it was like a metal plating beaten very fine.

Anna considered for a moment, then looked quaintly down. "No," she said, "I hardly think

they do. I once drew a pig, but John Desinski said it was all tail and no tone. So I never tried again after that."

They both laughed.

Then Mrs. Maxtead leant forward and stirred the fire. "Road number two," she said enigmatically. "But the position of Rome remains unchanged."

PART ONE—CHAPTER XII

IF the curio shop, the domain of old Solny, was silent with dust, the rest of the house — the parlour, the scanty bedrooms, the kitchen, each nook and crevice where Anna's brooms and cloths could make an entry — reflected cleanliness itself. It was her pride to be thorough; and much of the absorption that went to make her dreams, straightened her shoulders and bent her knees to unpleasant tasks.

Many a morning when the snow lay on the ground and the dawn had scarcely broken over Felt Street, the rattle of pails and pans might be heard in the tiny yard, the curl of smoke be seen rising from the chimney, as Anna, capable, self-reliant, and cheerful, went about the making of her father's early cup of tea; a task that, as a child of seven with sleepy eyes and numbed hands, she had first set herself to perform.

But whatever of her care, of her individuality, was to be seen throughout the house, it was in her own bedroom that she most markedly showed herself. A narrow room with whitewashed walls, slanting ceiling, and uneven floor, it was yet big enough to hold a key to her inner mind — a key that did not hang, as one might have expected, on the space of wall

between the little ivory water-font and John Desinski's study of a child's head; but a key that lay upon the bare boards in the form of an Eastern carpet strip so rich of texture, so gorgeous of colouring, that it defied time, and lay there in its scanty setting as much a flower in the desert of poverty as on the day when Anna, struggling under its weight, had proudly carried it from the shop up the crooked stairs — breathing and pausing on every step.

What circumstance had made it hers, what deed of virtue it had rewarded, what impulse on old Solny's part it had shown forth, she had long ago forgotten, but the thing remained — eternal, unchanging; her prayer rug, her magician's carpet, from whose arabesque she drew many a picture, in whose glowing tones she had many times mirrored the world from her narrow bed. It was part of herself; so woven to mystery in her imagination as almost to take on human form. Each twist of the design was the memento of some incident, the record of some hour. Across the wide stripe of blue were the two round marks where for years she had knelt morning and night to whisper — sometimes mechanically, sometimes with an excess of ardour — the aspirations of the Greek church that John Desinski had taught her to repeat. Then further down, where the orange crossed the blue, was the great stain that the broom had never quite removed — the stain that her tears had made when the same John Desinski, no longer able to sing or work, a cold, still shadow of

himself, was nailed into the deal coffin and carried with many horrible jerks and knocks down the narrow stairs. Then, last of all — the newest, keenest record of all — came the mark of candle grease on the triangle of black; the open, palpable proof of a heart that had throbbed and a hand that had trembled with excitement as she carried her candle upstairs on the first night that the enchanted wand had touched her eyelids — and she had seen life.

She gazed at it now as she stood leaning on the handle of her sweeping-brush, the pan of newly-gathered dust at her feet; gazed at it as she had gazed a hundred times in the past weeks, with eyes that saw in it an omen of unfathomable things. To her it was partly sacred, the one blot upon her treasure that she made no effort to wipe out. She looked long and questioningly; then she suddenly straightened herself, tossed back her plait, and picked up the dustpan with a jerk. Holding it carefully, she crossed to the open window and overturned it on the sill. Attentively she watched the specks, the threads, the tiny scraps of dust eddy out upon the air; then she dropped to her knees, taking her face between her hands.

From the Passage below rose the occasional sound of strife. It was the living hour of the day. Poles with drying clothes hung from the opposite windows, an odour of decaying vegetables hung on the air; but above, where the slanting roofs cut the sky, shone a space of frosty blue, and upon this she fixed

her gaze. She owned the inestimable quality of seeing nothing below her wants.

Her eyes rested on the strip of blue, and away, like zigzag lines, wandered the pictures of her mind. Granite castles, towered and battlemented, rose out of a shimmering cloud; belts of fir-trees shot into the air, frost-tipped and glistening as the sun; white avenues, stiff with ice, twisted to illimitable length. She looked till her eyes ached, then she rose and crossed the room. Her face was flushed, her eyes dark; she turned back the patched coverlet of the bed and drew out a book. It was a small book bound in calf; the leaves, thin and yellow, were torn in parts; across the fly-leaf ran the title "Abra-Mule; or, Love and Empire. A Tragedy." Passing this with small consideration, she opened the book at "The Plain Dealer, a Comedy," and began to read. The words from frequent perusal were known to her, but through habit her eyes skimmed the lines.

Five minutes passed — ten minutes — she still read on. Then a knock fell upon the door.

She forgot to raise her head and the knock was repeated. At last she lifted her chin.

"Come in!" she called, and at the same moment she thrust the book into its hiding-place.

The handle turned, and Johann's face showed round the corner of the door.

"You told me to tell you when it was twelve. It is twelve now." He looked harassed and ill at ease.

"Twelve already! Come in, Johann, my work 's all done. Come in while I put on my hat."

He obeyed slowly, and she wheeled towards him.

"Would you be nervous, to-day — if you were me?" She pushed a chair in his direction. "I was awake at five and I hardly ate any breakfast."

"I noticed," he said in a strained voice.

"After all, it is but natural, because it is the most splendid day of all my life. When I return to-night I 'll have seen a real play — not a play in a booth — or a play in a book," she glanced involuntarily towards the bed, "but a play in a theatre with a real stage." She broke off abruptly and looked across the room at the wistful face and the twisted body, so painfully conscious of itself. "Johann, is n't she too good to me?"

Johann turned his face from the light.

"Whatever seems good to you, Anna — is good to me. It is but natural that she should love you. It is but what I understand."

Anna ran to him and squeezed his fingers. "Johann! dear Johann! How kind you are! I feared that you might be cross to-day, and now you 're not. It seems good! Look, even the sun shines!" She nodded towards the window, then passed to the door and lifted her hat from the hook. She looked at it with a momentary sigh.

"Oh, Johann, she has such lovely clothes! Will she be ashamed, d' you think, to be seen with me?"

Johann gave one of his rare, harsh laughs. "Look in the glass," he said.

She turned, hurt and puzzled.

"Forgive! The frost makes my head ache. I am bitter — not worth one of your bright thoughts. But can you understand?" He half thrust out his hand, then drew it back. "Can you understand? This woman who claims you — who takes you away day after day — " He devoured her with his eyes. "This woman, Anna, has all — all; and we — your father and I — and the shop, we have nothing — nothing! Ah, I grow stupid with jealous thoughts — " His words broke; he rose and turned towards the door.

Anna thrust on her hat and picked up her coat.

"Johann!" She caught his arm. "You grudge, Johann?"

"Grudge! Ah, no — no." He turned vehemently. "Grudge! You know I would lie down under your feet to bring you one little wish."

In some points a woman, in others still strangely a child, Anna's eyes grew misty in quick response. She was touched without comprehending; without realising, she saw.

"Have I been unkind, Johann, these two months — since you came?"

"Unkind!" He tried to smile.

"Then what?"

He shook his head.

"You won't tell?"

'There is nothing to tell."

"Then you 'll come with me to the door? You 'll say good-bye?"

"Yes. I will come with you to the door."

They descended the stairs in silence, and in silence passed through the low-ceiled shop. Anna paused by her father's partitioned desk and tapped on the glass.

"I am going out, father," she called.

Solny looked up with abstracted eyes.

"Ah, so! Enjoy yourself, my child." He bent his head again.

Anna turned to Johann. "Do fathers ever ask where people go — or seem to care? Did your father care?" Her mind was strung by anticipation, but she was aware suddenly of a dropped link somewhere in her own life.

Looking at her puzzled face, a great impatience of old Solny rose in Johann's heart. "Perhaps some day," he said involuntarily, "he will learn to care too much."

Anna gazed at him in question.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I told you I was bitter to-day." He walked across the shop.

Her face was grave as she followed him to the door; but at the door the frost in the air was keen. It swept doubt and disappointment before it, as cobwebs are brushed aside. She turned — her hand held out.

"It's my great day, Johann. Won't you say 'Good luck'?"

In contrast to the white world, Johann's face looked grey. "Good luck. And — and God take care of you, Anna."

She smiled up at him, but her eyes were seeing ahead. The youth in the wintry air was calling in kinship to her. She drew away her hand and ran down the street.

He leant back against the door-post, hardly realising that she was gone; then his mind quickened with hope. She had forgotten him as she sped away, but she would remember. At the corner of the street she would remember and turn back. It was a trivial hope; the point of triviality is sometimes sharp and probes deep. In a flash the idea conquered him. He leant out, peering down the street.

He watched her eager step, the poise of her head — the everything and the nothing that in two months had become the aureole about his being. On and on; farther and farther. He could see the lithe shoulders straighten, he could feel her lips part as she drank in the air.

"Ah, surely, surely —" The words broke from him, then cracked on his lips. He moved back heart-sick and dizzy. She had passed out of sight.

For a moment his eyes dropped, unable to rise above the ground. Then imperceptibly, something in the dazzling sky above his head attracted him —

reminded him of her. He looked up laboriously; after a minute his lips moved.

"God take care of her!" he said; and turning, he walked into the shop.

PART ONE — CHAPTER XIII

"AND the play, Anna? The play?"

Anna was silent. It was the third time she had been silent to the same question, put on each occasion in a fresh form. Without raising her eyes she stirred in the deep chair and stretched her feet to the fire.

Mrs. Maxtead pulled back the white silk curtains of her bedroom windows and let the last of the grey daylight fall into the room; then she moved to the dressing-table and shifted the silver scent-bottles from place to place. She was on the eve of testing chance, and through all her blood she felt the nearness of events.

It had been decisive from the first. From the moment that the footlights had been raised, and she had caught sight of Anna's eyes in the dimness of the box, she had felt the crisis in the air.

Her moment had come and she gripped it, metaphorically, between her fingers. Then, as a cat with a mouse, she experienced the longing to let it slip a little way for the keen delight of drawing it back again. She would make certainty trebly certain before she burnt her boats. With a sense of exaltation she loosened her fur wrap and laid it on the bed; then she crossed deliberately to the fire and stood

behind Anna — her elbows resting on the back of the girl's chair, her face held between her hands. A compelling vitality pervaded her; there was a peculiar, half-humorous expectation in her very attitude as her glance fell on the girl's hair.

She chose her opening sentence with excessive care.

"My dear Anna," she said with cutting clearness, "you are absolutely wrong. The woman was absurd in the part. Absurd!" She smiled her keen smile as she saw the impassive shoulders stiffen, but her face was blank as Anna turned round.

"Absurd?" The girl spoke questioningly, a vague reproach overshadowing her eyes; then her face flushed, becoming suddenly and sensitively alive. "How can you be so — so unjust!" There was a thrill in her voice.

Mrs. Maxtead's lids were lowered; she looked carefully at her polished nails. The trap had been almost too well baited. With extreme consistency she controlled her voice.

"My dear little Anna, you are so very young! There are such essential grades in an actress — such degrees. You, who have never before seen a play —" She made a delicate movement with her shoulders. "I, who have seen them by the score —" She broke her sentences with good effect.

Anna's bewildered eyes sought hers.

"But people cheered and stamped and clapped."

"In the gallery people are forced to stamp — to rest their feet."

The bewildered look deepened in Anna's eyes.

"But she was real," she persisted; "she was real. Think of her when she stood up in the second act with her hands stiff and her eyes cold. Oh, I think you are unjust!"

The other's eyelids drooped again. "But, my dear child, how she tortured her words! She gave the lines like this—"

Mrs. Maxtead was never so sweetly natural as in a studied scene. She dropped her arms from the chair with a perfectly impulsive jerk, and the droop of her head, as she seemed to pause on her resolve, was without a flaw; later, when she moved across the room, the swish of her skirts against the carpet was the essence of spontaneous haste. By the narrow bookcase she paused with a touch of question. Each of the tightly-packed books was bound in white; her fingers moved hesitatingly, consideringly, over the upper tier; hovered above a volume that stood slightly forward from the rest; then, with a delightful air of decision, fell on it and drew it out.

Her head was bent, her fingers busy with the pages as she recrossed the room. "Her reading of the passage was something like this, Anna— If I am wrong, you will correct me?" She looked up with a brilliant smile.

Anna turned questioningly, but her companion's gaze had returned to the book.

She took up her old position, but her attitude was

slightly changed; she could now watch Anna's profile, clear cut against the glowing fire. She arranged the book; then very deliberately set herself to read from the play.

She had a flexible voice, and she dropped it to a dull monotone that touched and frayed the nerves. At the fifth line she saw the girl's lips twitch and her nostrils distend. She bent her head with a little nod — a just perceptible movement of satisfaction — and went steadily on.

For several seconds Anna sat rigid; then she moved uneasily in her chair, leant back, bent forward, her susceptibilities throbbing like the pendulum of a clock.

The monotonous voice went on — on — irritating, persistent, seemingly endless. Anna felt a dampness on her forehead. She lifted her hand and pushed back her hair. Something within her was being slowly wound up and up. The inner self — the self that had risen as from long darkness on the night of Johann's rescue; the unnamed power that had ridden above her, giving her heart, giving her capacity, giving her wings to soar.

She rose unevenly — a great light on her face; and without a gesture of preparation swept the book from the other's hand.

"You are cruel. Unjust and cruel! What you read is a lie. She spoke it this way — " She threw back her head with sure decision, and began slowly, line by line.

For ten minutes the room seemed to hold its breath. The words were the words of a fine play; at the matinée they had been spoken by a fine actress; but now, in the quiet of the firelight, from the lips of a young, untaught girl, with an audience of one, they had a meaning unpossessed before. The spark that God sets in the few glowed in her voice and shone in her eyes.

Mrs. Maxtead's glance was over-bright, her face a little pale, when Anna laid down the book; her sureness, her spontaneity seemed to have forsaken her, as she crossed the room.

"You will be the greatest actress I have ever known," she said; and for the first time in her own knowledge there was a quiver in her voice.

PART ONE—CHAPTER XIV

THROUGH the window of the little room above the curio shop the sun no longer shone; the curtain was closely drawn, a candle flickered in the coldness of the air and cast shadows on the bare, washed walls. By the old-fashioned chest of drawers stood Anna; her hat was on, one arm was still through the sleeve of her coat, the other had been hastily drawn out; between her fingers she held an envelope, thick and square in shape. She held it closely, and as she moved nearer to the candle flame she twisted it between her hands. On her face were mingled expressions — excitement, hesitancy, speculation.

She twisted the envelope again; and her mind, with swift precision, reviewed the events that had made it hers.

As in a shifting picture she saw herself once more in the luxurious bedroom; saw the white curtains, through which the daylight filtered as through mist, saw the long glasses that reflected her in every attitude upon every hand; the bed with its embroidered sheets and silk coverlet; then the picture stirred, growing clearer and closer to her mental sight. A fresh moment became discernible — the moment

when the great impulse had swept her, dominating her, making her its instrument, and she had read aloud unconscious of everything but the stirring words.

As out of a long dream she heard again Mrs. Maxtead's voice, short, convinced, unlike itself; and again in remembrance she felt her heart bound and then stand still. She leant nearer to the light and moved the envelope afresh. Her memories disintegrated like portions of a film, then merged together again. She saw Mrs. Maxtead pass over the carpet and disappear into her dressing-room; she saw herself motionless, unheedful of the moments, gazing into the fire. Then came her hostess's return after an indefinite lapse of time; her very movement and its sound came back to the girl; she even lifted her head as she had lifted it then and saw in imagination the curve of the trailing dress, the envelope in the outstretched hand. This same envelope! She passed her finger-tips slowly over its smooth surface.

"My dear little Anna—" The cold, clear words seemed to cut the air again; she saw herself turn in response. "My dear little Anna, there are moments in life when one is forced to hold up one's hands and say— Enough! We could talk till midnight, but we would mar an effect that we could never reproduce. Now our effect shall not be marred. I am going to be wise; I am going to send you away in time." Again Anna heard the low, peculiar laugh. "But I am not sending you alone. Take this letter

and read it in your own room, with your door locked. Then to-morrow come to me again. I shall wait in all day." Anna looked down and smoothed the envelope afresh.

On the roof opposite a cat wailed. The sound roused her. She crossed to the window and drew the curtain back. Then with a sudden impulse she turned into the room and tore the envelope apart. The first three lines she deciphered in semi-darkness; then she stepped to the candle and held the pages to the light. Her fingers shook a little, and her throat seemed tied with cords.

"My dear Anna,—This is not an essay, it is not a letter; it is a question—and the answer lies with you."

Anna laid down the sheets and pushed back her hair; then she took a deep, agitated breath.

"To be candid is the privilege of the strong," she read carefully. "It is only weakness that hangs on the outskirts of a point. I will rob the point even of its frills; I will be blunt.

"On the first day that I saw you I felt that somewhere, on some plane of life, you were meant to stand quite alone. In the mint of existence we are all stamped; and your stamp is in your eyes, in your voice, in the exasperatingly inimitable something that marks you all over.

"That was a month ago, and I was prophetic; this is to-day, and I am justified. When I told myself then that you had genius, I was original;

when I repeat it now, I but anticipate the whole world by a year or two.

"This may seem too big a sentence, too strong a sentiment; if it does, just pause. Lay down the paper before you read another line and think — think hard. Shut your eyes and repeat slowly to yourself, 'This is written by a woman — of a woman.' If that fails to convince you, I have no more to say."

Anna paused and unconsciously obeyed. The candle flame seemed to lengthen, then to shorten; the walls to contract, then to expand. She put up her hand and tentatively touched her face; she was doubtful even of herself. It was as if a great clamour of music had beaten on her ears and then passed by, leaving her deafened. Automatically she lifted the letter to the light again.

"And now," it ran on, "as I have made my prologue, let me come to facts; let me range your equipments and your drawbacks side by side. On the one hand you have brain, you have good looks, you have ambition — though you have n't discovered it as yet; on the other hand — remember I am being blunt — on the other hand you have no education to speak of, you have no position worth the name, you possess not one influential friend. Left to yourself, what future do you see? Let me answer for you. The saddest future on this profitable earth — the future of a thwarted career, of a discontented, wasted life. Now where is the remedy, where is the loophole? For even the pessimists sometimes admit that

we are each given one chance at least. My child, the remedy lies with me!"

For a second the pages fluttered in Anna's hand and her eyes darkened; then she recovered herself and went steadily on.

"The remedy lies with me. I am your chance! To be poetic, there is a golden ladder waiting for you, but you will need it to be steadied while you climb. Well, you have seen my hands — they are unusually strong.

"Give yourself to me and there is nothing to which you may not attain. Thanks to your nationality, you already speak in French. You shall go to France — to Paris, from where so many stars have shone. For five years you will work — work — work; for five years no one will see you, though it will be my duty, when the time comes, to arrange that your name is not unknown. When the five years are passed, you will come into a world that is waiting for you. Some day you will understand what that means.

"You admire my house; I have seen your admiration in your eyes. My child, this house is a hovel compared to what you can have by the lifting of your hand. You can have jewels, you can have dresses, you can have admiration without end — should admiration please you; but through it all, above it all, you will have your ambition to keep you straight. I feel my frozen enthusiasm thaw for you. Long ago, when the world, and the

minds in the world, were very young, there were fairies and magic wands. Nowadays the world is old and there are no more fairies; but the magic wand still remains. It is no longer tangible; we call it by a different name; but it can still conjure. It can still turn enemies to friends, corn to gold, pumpkins to carriages. It is the little spark we term genius, the little spark which we worship and envy and cringe to — and with which we light our own dull lives."

About Anna's throat the cords seemed to tighten, to strain, then to snap. With a sob she dropped the letter and covered her face. In that moment it seemed to her that she was very near to God.

It was the numbness of her fingers at last that brought her back to thought. With a start she remembered that the letter was still to finish — that every dream, no matter how golden, has its waking. Stiffly, almost reluctantly, she stretched out her arm, collected the scattered sheets, smoothed them and found her place. There was a space in the letter where she herself had broken off — a space of blank paper; and with a touch of intuition it seemed to her that she could see the writer pause, laugh, move her fingers restlessly, then dip her pen newly into the ink.

"How I have rhapsodised!" The writing was neater and more studied in this second beginning. "It would seem, Anna, that you have imbued me with some of your youth — that never appreciated

gift that tarnishes so very soon. But I drift again! My child, you must pull me up. A woman of thirty with sentiments! How futile — Let me start afresh.

"All that I have offered you I can give — and more. Mentally I see your generosity leap up as you read this; but that must not be. As I have often told you, for everything I give it is my policy to receive. I have my interest, like the money-lender — the pursuer of any trade. In this case, believe me, I am all self. Heretofore I have steered my little boat evenly through troubled seas; in the future I mean to rise on the very crest of the wave with you. As for my conditions, they are these:

"First, we enter into a ten years' bargain — not a legal bargain as yet, for you are not legally of age; but a bargain of honour. I see just how high honour stands with you and — I take the risk. For the first five years I meet every expense; for the second five I take a percentage — a large one, remember, upon all money that you make. If you succeed, well — there is the crest of the wave for us both; if you fail — But there is no such word!

"That is my first condition, my second is more personal — womanlike, I put it to the last. So make a clear head and take your courage in both hands, for you are facing your first problem."

Anna felt her fingers turn a little colder; otherwise she remained unmoved.

"My child, when I say that I can claim experience I scarcely think you will dispute the point. I do claim experience. I have seen mistakes made; I have made my own mistakes; and in your regard I am determined — I say it with all force — I am determined that there shall be no false step. Now the great artist, like the great ruler, must have no past. It is essential. I have known it — I have proved it to be true. A future is one's own; a past is the property of imbeciles and knaves.

"Were I to speak to you face to face, to give you my reasons, to raise you my arguments, I know that by their very truth I must win you to my side; but this is a fight that, if possible — if at all possible — I want you to wage for yourself. I make the proposition; it is for you — I hope without prejudice or persuasion — to accept.

"To be concise, my meaning lies like this. If you come to me, you come alone. You leave your father and your home; you break your life voluntarily in two — setting one half aside with things that are done with and dead, giving the other half to me — to be born afresh.

"Perhaps I seem inexplicable — I know that I seem cruel; in reality I am neither. I am merely a woman who has fished for long in the pond of Publicity, and who has studied the seasons — and the flies.

"My dear child, in your present life there is an element — for the moment we will call it an element,

to-morrow I can be explicit if you desire — an element that has wrapped you in secrecy, an element that brought you to me in the first instance upon a mission of — forgive me — a very doubtful kind. Now this element is your own, under the microscope its particles might prove innocent enough; but — there is the inevitable but — is it the sand in which to set the reporter, the interviewer, the busybody of five years hence, digging with his little spade? I have put the question to myself in fifty forms, and the answer has unchangingly been 'No.'

"No. You are going to be too great; you are going to set your tent too fully in the daylight. There must be no loophole for petty spite.

"Put the past away from you Every woman learns the word 'sacrifice' at some period of her life; be thankful to learn it now. Tears flow easily — and dry easily — at sixteen. For the rest, I have taxed your thoughts enough; if I have overtaxed them I can only plead my cause. Come to me to-morrow at any time; no one has ever been more looked for than you will be. JEANNE MAXTEAD."

There was a dull pause. Anna folded the letter, refolded it slowly; then, with a swift movement, blew out the light.

PART ONE—CHAPTER XV

REACTION falls upon some natures like an enveloping cloud, wrapping them in a stupor of calm.

When Anna left her room and descended the crooked staircase, her manner and her step were subdued. She walked to the door of the parlour and stood looking in. In the room the fire burnt brilliantly, but the lamp was lowered; in the conflicting lights Johann moved softly, laying the supper-table.

Her eyes wandered slowly round, vaguely noting the sameness of the furniture, the unaltered position of the books. Then, by one of those freaks of chance—those lights and shades of circumstances upon which human endeavour so often hangs—her vision narrowed to Johann and his task.

She stood by the lintel of the door with inert hands and eyes half shut—seeing and yet not seeing; then suddenly she stirred, lifted her hand and let it drop again, as a thought pierced her mind. It stung her with the force of pain, scattering her calm. For weeks her place was being gently and unobtrusively filled. She lifted her hand again. One by one, grade by grade, the irksome tasks had been

lifted from her shoulders to another's, while she stood passively by. The knowledge was clear-cut and unerring; for the second time she let her hand fall.

She crossed the room and raised the wick of the lamp; then she passed to the fire and crouched before it, spreading her fingers to the blaze. The wheel of her ideas had ceased to turn. The click of china behind her, the soft motion of Johann's feet — pausing here, halting there — absorbed her consciousness; beyond him her thoughts would not stray. The knowledge that his eyes were fixed on her was so sharp, the certainty that his lips trembled and yet dreaded to speak was so absolute, that it held her still. At last with an effort she broke the spell.

"Johann, where did these logs come from?" She nodded towards a pile of wood, stacked to dry in the warmth of the fire.

The click of china ceased. In imagination she saw Johann's lips fall apart, in the eager, half-reluctant action that always preceded speech. And hot upon the fancy came another thought; the thought of a life in which Johann's lips and Johann's words and all that pertained to them would be a memory — lapsing, losing detail with every year. The thought frightened her. She raised her voice.

"Johann, where did they come from — these logs?"

He made a deprecating sound. "You have often

said how fine the wood fires are. A ship with timber came in to-day; I heard of it — and I remembered. It was very simple." He stopped.

Anna stiffened her hands.

"And you carried the wood home?"

"Of course. It was very simple."

There was a wait. A burning coal dropped with a little crash. Anna raised her head.

"The stairs were cleaned to-day; I saw as I came in. Who cleaned them?"

"I cleaned them."

A groan rose to Anna's lips, but did not escape. She looked before her at the crackling fire.

"Johann!"

"Yes, Anna."

It was the old formula. The question sharp and decisive; the answer ready, anticipating, hungering to comply.

"Johann, you have done the work of the whole house while I have been away. When will you do your own work, all the tedious work that father sets you?"

Johann was silent and embarrassed.

"Johann, when?"

"I shall find time."

She changed her position. Dropping to the edge of the fender, she turned round. "Johann, you mean that you will sit up half the night — that you slave — that you do your own work and mine as well, while I stand by and do nothing — nothing at all."

The words dropped separately, incontestably; for the first time in weeks, facts, naked and cold, stood shivering in the light. She saw Johann and she saw herself. Suddenly she rose.

"Johann," her eyes were direct, her hands were clasped behind her, "Johann, why do you do all this for me?"

There was an acute silence; then a cup slipped from Johann's hand. He stooped and fumbled on the floor. Something within him was leaping in answer to her words; somewhere in his inner consciousness a voice was crying, "Now! Now!" It echoed through him, it reeled in his brain. He lifted himself laboriously to one knee. His pulses were bounding. The gates of life seemed ajar, needing but a touch.

"Johann, tell the truth."

The voice sent the blood to his forehead; he caught the table and drew himself slowly up, then he turned to her. His face was in shadow, hers was in the full light. The arrangement was prophetic. It struck him with a chill. He steadied himself and felt the tide of blood recede.

"Anna—" he began, then paused. She stood unconsciously typifying Fate. The red crown of her hair, the darkness of her eyes — each was symbolic.

He drew a long breath, such a breath as he had drawn on the first night, at his first sight of her.

"Johann," she said again, "why do you do it?"

There was a space of indecision, a moment fraught with hesitancy; then he spoke, his face still averted.

"Why does one serve God?"

Anna stirred, laying her fingers on his arm. A faint shiver passed through him, but he did not move.

"Some serve God for payment. That is not what you mean?"

He was silent.

"Johann!" She jerked his sleeve.

Suddenly and awkwardly he turned; his eyes were full of pain. "No," he said, "that is not what I mean. There is another service, Anna, beside that." He steadied himself. "There is a service that gives and gives — because it must." He thrust out his hand and caught hers. "A service of the heart, not of the head. A service where the heart must give, must give — or must break —" His fingers tightened, his eyes burned. Involuntarily she drew back.

"And that service, Johann — what is it called?"

He leant forward; the word trembled on his tongue, hung on the air, then died out unspoken. With a hopeless gesture he let her hand fall.

But her eyes still questioned.

"In saying God, Johann, do you mean me?" A sense of awe mingled in the words; the breath of something deep and intangible brushed her; the shadow of life fell on her in an impenetrable cloud. "Johann, you mean —" She paled uncertainly.

Quite steadily he returned her glance. The glow had gone from his face as the light from a quenched candle. "Yes, that is what I mean. You saved me — you are God to me."

"And if one lost God?" Her words were low and indistinct. "Johann, if one lost God?"

He raised his shoulders automatically, and again thrust out his hands, but without touching hers. "I have said. With loss — the heart breaks." He caught up a piece of bread and bending it between his fingers broke it in two; then he crossed to the fire and dropped the pieces into the blaze.

Anna stood by the table. She was perfectly silent, perfectly still; she was fighting inch by inch. No one who glanced at her eyes could have seen the tumult behind them; no one who watched her first forward movement could have guessed that with it a castle toppled summarily from the skies. The battle was vital, absorbed, intense. At last reluctantly, step by step, she crossed the room.

"Johann," she said.

He sprang towards her.

"Johann, you said once 'I trust you!' Will you say it again now — to please me?"

With a sharp movement he caught her hand. "Ah, more than myself. For always, Anna — for always!"

For a moment she looked down at his bent head; then the warmth of his generosity shook her, flowed with a rush across her heart. Her tears rose, blur-

ring her sight; her perplexity and her doubt met and broke in a sob.

"Oh, Johann!" she cried with childish abandonment. "Johann! Johann!"

And up from the depths of remembrance, clear and far as a bell among the mountains, mocking and distinct as an echo, came the ghost of a sentence.

"Tears flow easily — and dry easily — at sixteen!"

With a little gasp her sobbing ceased.

PART ONE—CHAPTER XVI

MRS. MAXTEAD blotted the letter that she was writing and laid it on the top of her desk. Then she pushed back her chair.

For two minutes she had been conscious that Anna was standing in the doorway ; for quite one minute she had been aware that her own pulses were moving at a quickened rate ; but appearances were of primary account. She was careful first to blot the letter, afterwards to turn round.

Her unmoved expression as she greeted the girl did her credit. Anna, at a first glance, was disconcerting. Her figure was limp, her face marred by sleeplessness and tears.

Like the organiser of a campaign, Mrs. Maxtead summed up the situation. She bracketed the state of affairs and her own plan of action ; then she went forward with both hands silently held out.

Anna stood motionless for a second ; then suddenly walked past her into the room, pausing by the bed.

"I only came for a minute," she said. "I did n't want to come at all — but it seemed right. The letter is no good! No good! I have thought it out and I can't do it — I can't!" Her voice

jerked, her sentences did not join. Mrs. Maxtead's eyelids drooped a shade.

"The word 'cannot' is so tentative," she said at last softly. "However we disguise it, it is always tentative. It was invented so." She moved towards the bed, her figure fragile against the whitened light, — a fragility in contrast to the expression of her mouth.

"Dear little girl!" With a caressing touch she laid her fingers on Anna's coat and opened the top button. "Dear little girl!" The second button came undone.

Anna moved impatiently.

"It 's no good! You must n't. It only hurts."

The sky outside was leaden; great raindrops fell at intervals, each with a little splash. Mrs. Maxtead walked to the window and half drew the curtains; then she stepped to the fire and stirred it to a blaze. Long tongues of flame shot up, casting lines of brightness; she watched them interestedly as she dropped into a chair.

"Anna," she said deliberately, "I wrote you a whole sermon. Surely you will cry quits? Proposals like mine are not disposed of in six or seven words; people like me are not disposed of in — six or seven words."

Anna looked round.

"I — I think I 'd like to go," she said.

"Why?" The word was intensely fine, incredibly sharp.

"Because — " Anna's strength deserted her. "Because my mind is made up, you know — fixed. Because — " She twisted her fingers.

Mrs. Maxtead sat very still.

"Anna — come here."

Anna moved reluctantly forward.

"Sit down! It tires me to see people stand."

Still reluctantly Anna drew forward a chair and obeyed. She trembled to shake off the fascination that was holding her, to stand up and go; but she lacked the courage of the act. She sat mute and miserable.

Mrs. Maxtead's voice broke in again — low, silky, reasonable.

"How long is it since you first came here?"

"Nine weeks."

"In those nine weeks you have seen more than you ever saw — learnt more — understood more?"

Anna nodded.

"And — this is not meanness, it is necessity; I want to force a point. In those nine weeks you have been given, constantly given; you have never once been asked to give. Is that not so?"

Anna flushed deeply.

"What do you want?" she asked after a pause.

Mrs. Maxtead smiled. "That is right! Life should never be made harder than it is. For the moment, I want the small gift of your confidence."

The flush died slowly out of Anna's face. She rose.

The other held out her hand. "Sit down again; it is not so very terrible. A question or two — that is all." She leant forward, her face impassive, her lashes lowered. It was a bad omen for an opponent when she hid her eyes. Her voice had never been more smooth than when she spoke again.

"It is not for yourself, Anna, that you refuse this offer?"

"No." Anna's tone was uneven and dragged.

The other waited. Her next question came in a change of key.

"Your father is eccentric. You have often said that he scarcely knows that you exist. Am I right in that?"

Anna took a deep breath. For the first time the warmth and scent of the room seemed to suffocate. She made a great effort.

"Yes, you are right."

Mrs. Maxtead's eye remained upon the fire.

"And you can tell me, candidly tell me, that it is for a man who ignores you, that you refuse?" The voice was metallic; it scattered Anna's caution.

"No," she said hurriedly; "it is not — it is not for him."

"Ah!" Mrs. Maxtead stirred ever so little. "Then it is for the Austrian — the man who stole my jewels?"

Anna's chair made a dull rasp as she pushed it back. She rose; took a step forward, a step back;

then, with a loss of vitality, sank into her seat again. Long ago the story of Judas had fascinated her from John Desinski's lips. The vision of the silver pieces seemed to rise now and float before her mind. In an agony of self-accusation she clasped her hands.

"When did I say it?" she said slowly. "How did I say it?" She leant forward in her chair.

From her place by the fire Mrs. Maxtead laughed. "How great you would be in tragedy," she said. "But you need not accuse yourself; my knowledge hasn't come from you. It is an event in a sequence of events — nothing more." She leant back and closed her eyes. Her face was perfectly alert, perfectly serene; the face of a woman who appreciates the moment to its minutest point.

"You see, when a child like you starts a game of consequences with me, the handicap is too great; the result is too clear. On the first day that you came here I had you followed. Since then I have seen you constantly — with other people's eyes; have wound the whole skein of your circumstances thread by thread. Now, what have you to say?" Like a flash she turned the brightness of her eye upon the girl. "What have you to say?"

Anna looked up. Her lips were set.

"I suppose — I am like a mouse in a trap," she said.

"Rather descriptive! But the trap has yet to shut. Is it to be war between us?"

"I don't understand."

"Then I shall explain. It is like this—" She rose and crossed to the girl's side. "You have a possession that I have waited all my life to handle. I am not crueller, not more self-seeking, not more unscrupulous than nineteen out of every twenty human beings; I have the courage of my egotism, that is all. You have put this thing within my grasp; and now that I have all but closed my fingers on it, you pull it back — and you say 'No.' Now as strongly as you say 'No,' I say 'Yes.' I will have it; my desire is fixed on it." Her voice, cold and smooth, never rose; she made no effective gestures; only her eyes inexorably compelled the girl's gaze. "Yesterday I pleaded with you, Anna; to-day I do not plead — I demand."

Anna rose. From the chaos round her one object disentangled itself — Johann's face, pitiful, trusting, eloquent in appeal.

"It 's no good, it makes no difference."

"Will you tell me precisely why?"

In her agitation, Anna walked to the dressing-table and touched the silver brushes. "You have found out my secret," she said unevenly; "if I tell you another it will scarcely count. First, I refused to come because I would hurt somebody else; now I refuse because I hate you!" She turned round.

Mrs. Maxtead passed her hand over her hair. A

very faint flush touched her cheek, then died away. "In five years," she said, "we will both remember this — and laugh. I am glad I have my temper in good control."

There was a pause.

"And this Austrian — is his honesty really as brittle as his heart?"

Anna bit her lip.

"Did he make you his — confidante in the jewel affair?"

"I am his only friend."

"A dangerous position!"

Anna was silent.

"And his only interest in life — as well as his only friend?"

"Yes." At the root of Anna's voice there was a misgiving; she crushed it down.

"Does he never refer to the jewels now?"

"No; he never refers."

"Because his innocence is so well proved?"

"Oh, you are very cruel!"

"He would court a trial, you think?"

"Oh, no. I don't know! I don't know!"

Mrs. Maxtead smiled. "Anna, there is something here — " She thoughtfully crossed the room. "Something for you to read." She stopped by the desk and her hand hovered above it. "Sometimes sidelights are very illuminating." She searched, and drew out a letter. It was written in careful English in a fine, foreign hand.

"Just glance through it." She waved the sheets and they rustled a little against the air.

Mechanically Anna stretched out her arm. A great fear, a great shadow seemed lurching towards her. She opened the letter cautiously, as if contagion lurked between the lines.

"The whole letter?"

Mrs. Maxtead looked up. "Not quite the whole letter; say from the third page."

Anna found the place.

"In the matter of the jewels, my dear friend," the writing ran, "I commend your philosophy! For myself, I can claim no such calm. In one direction at least, my fingers itch."

"Who wrote this?" Anna's tone was sharp; then without waiting for an answer she read on again.

"My fingers itch after my lost messenger, whom your whirlpool of London seems to have caught in its eddy. But as yet I do not repine; such carrion rise to the surface if one has the patience to wait. When the time arrives I promise you I shall possess myself to the value of the stones. I shall urge the prosecution to its limits — and the limits should be wide. The fellow is either imbecile or a villain; in one case or in the other he will obtain his deserts. As my pen inscribes this, I think I see you smile!"

Anna laid down the letter and glanced up. She would not admit the thought that was knocking at her heart; but against her will her eyes mirrored it.

"This is Golstock?" she said.

"That is Golstock."

Her lips opened stiffly. Mrs. Maxtead read their question and made a motion with her hand.

"In that letter," she said, "you have the whole man. It is an interesting letter. The loss of the stones he accepts — he shrugs his shoulders at; but the fact of being duped he does not accept. That rankles like a pebble in a wound. But, my dear little girl, we fence! We have fenced all along." The quizzical tone died out of her voice; she ceased to guard her eyes. She was keen, direct, set to her point.

Instinctively Anna straightened herself.

"My dear child, let me put things to you as they are. Let the issue be plain."

Anna moved inconsequently to the desk and picked up a paper-knife.

"I have never seen this Austrian — you know that. But I have made a picture of him through you — through Golstock — through my maid Céleste. I know him as if I had met him a hundred times. In many points he is like a dog; and like a maimed dog he has appealed to you. He is gentle, faithful, trusting — trusting above all things; but he lacks one trait that the dog possesses. He is a coward!"

Anna caught her breath.

"Yes, he is a coward! You say that if he lost you his heart would break. Now that works two

ways. The man who breaks his heart in one instance may cut his throat in another!"

The knife fell from Anna's hand to the desk. Shakingly she picked it up. Her face was colourless as she turned round. "I don't understand," she said. "I don't understand."

"Are you quite sure that you don't understand?"

She was silent.

Mrs. Maxtead moved slowly towards her.

"Are you quite sure?"

A wild expression swept over the girl's eyes.

Mrs. Maxtead came nearer by a step. With her, excitement was a white heat, nearer to frost than fire.

"It is because you do understand that you are silent. Before a great fear speech overflows; before a great fact it shrinks away. Now in this affair there are three factors: Golstock, waiting like a hungry spider; I, ready with a turn of my wrist to twitch the fly into his web; you, midway between us, holding the reins of Destiny." She laughed gently between her words. "Which is to come uppermost? Spider or fly?"

Anna moved across the room. "You could n't—?" she said.

Her tormentor ceased to laugh. "My dear child, since I was nine years old I have rated myself first. In a crisis habit always counts. I'd face facts, if I were you."

Anna moved on till the door was reached. At the door she turned, leaning her shoulder against it.

"You don't think that Johann stole the stones?"

"Candidly, I do not."

"Then you think — ?"

"That his presence — his existence hinders me; beyond that I do not think. If he goes to his punishment it will be you who sent him there. My conscience will be clear."

"You are cruel!"

"I am human. You are looking at the present moment; I am looking five years ahead. One day you will thank me for my long sight. Go home, and face things. Question yourself, question Johann; if you find him ready to meet Golstock" — she lengthened her words — "ready to face the evidence of the clasp — brought back by you as restitution; the evidence of his life in hiding, then — well and good! You cannot do better than sit down in your curio shop — and wait. But if — if, on the other hand, he is not so ready to take the risk; if the loss of you in a secure refuge seems more endurable than the loss of you in a prison, then" — she let the sentence fall and caught it up again, urgency and speed tipping the words — "then, make your farewells to-night and come to me in the morning; I shall give you until ten. Sudden decisions — forced decisions hold the best."

Anna's shoulder pressed heavily against the panel of the door.

"And if I — if I were to come —" The words were faint, reluctant. "If I were — to come — Johann would be safe?"

"My dear, am I Golstock's bloodhound?"

Anna turned the handle of the door, moved forward, then, on the threshold, turned back.

"How hard you are!" she said.

Mrs. Maxtead laughed. "It is like a doctor operating on a child. The knife hurts; the child screams; but the doctor can afford to smile." Calmly picking up Golstock's letter from the floor, she folded it.

In the doorway Anna still stood irresolute.

"I — I — I hate you!" she said suddenly. "I — I hate you!" And she fled downstairs.

PART ONE—CHAPTER XVII

OLD Solny sat by the parlour fire, immersed in a book. When Anna entered the room, he raised his eyes absently, shifted his position, then dropped his gaze again.

She came in hurriedly. Her first glance was at the Dutch clock. The hands marked eight. Her conscience stung her, and she looked towards the table; but the supper of an hour ago had been removed. In place of the after fragments, the crumbs, the soiled plates, a clean cloth met her glance; a solitary cup and saucer, a solitary knife and fork, newly polished in expectation of her coming. Her eyes strayed from the table to the fire; with a dull sinking of the heart she saw the kettle ready placed. She turned to her father.

"Where is Johann?" she said.

Solny took the number of his page, then closed the book. "Johann!" he repeated vaguely; then he collected himself. "Johann has gone for his walk." He opened the book again.

Anna moved towards the table. There was a horrible conclusiveness in the words; they seemed a last spur, were a last spur needed; the comprehensive

proof, suggesting everything, covering everything. The picture was complete in its clearness. The fugitive who feared the open day; the man who crept for exercise in the shadow of the wall, under cloak of the night. She opened her coat, button by button; then pulled it off suddenly and threw it on a chair.

She was splashed with mud; her boots were soaked; she had walked for hours without hunger or fatigue. But Nature was lying in wait for her. On the table were cheese and butter and freshly-baked bread. With a childish reluctance her eyes travelled back and rested upon them; then her nostrils distended, and moving to the table she caught up a knife.

For five minutes she ate hungrily and in silence; then she pushed her plate away.

With food events loomed clearer; her position faced her without thought on her part. She sat down and rested her elbows on the table, supporting her face between her hands. Once her lips parted, but she restrained the words. Once she glanced at her father, but her face dropped back to its former attitude; his head was bent above his book.

At last, with a swerving motion, she pushed back her chair and walked to the farther end of the room. At the farther end were packing-cases — some empty, others half full. She looked down upon them silently; then turned and retraced her steps. With her hand on the table she paused.

"Father" she said unsteadily.

Old Solny did not hear.

She drew in her breath and crossed agitatedly to the window; kneeling on the window-sill, she looked out.

The blurred panes gave on the little yard. With attentive listening she could hear the reluctant raindrops falling on the buckets and zinc cans; with a stretch of imagination she could see the grass blades between the cobbles, that in summer time, seen through the imperfect glass, spread and elongated to prairie greenness. The idea blew across her with a breath of past things. She saw herself a baby with big eyes and pale face, little hands clasped, little cheeks pressed against the glass, lost in wonder at the sight. How long ago it seemed!

She sighed.

How long ago! How much farther, how much longer would it seem? She tightened her hands one above the other, and pressed her hot face against the pane. One tear — two — splashed down in slow accompaniment to the rain; with a swift impulse she moved till her lips touched the glass. Then she turned and her feet came sharply to the ground.

"Father!" she said again.

Solny moved without turning round. "Yes, my child."

Perhaps it was the moment, perhaps the unwonted tenderness of the words, but her heart swelled: a sob rose to her throat and was driven back.

"Father —" Her head felt very light. She walked slowly round the room, pausing at each point, halting finally behind his chair. "Father —"

Curiosity held no place in Solny. He stared straight before him at the fire.

"Father, there is a question I want to ask."

"Well, my child?" The tone was gentle and vague.

"Father, which is easier to mend — a broken heart or a cut throat?" Her breath seemed to catch and break.

There was a pause. Her eyes were turned nervously on the door that led into the shop; to her strained ears the clock ticked with incredible loudness.

"Father —?" she urged.

He lifted his head and answered as from a dream.

"There is no mending, my child, for either; they differ, that is all."

Anna's fingers were steel against his arm. "And the difference — the difference?"

His head drooped.

"One makes life so long," he said, "that a man dare not look ahead; the other makes life so short that he dare not look behind." He still spoke as from a dream.

Anna's fingers relaxed, his arm dropped; she stood for a moment with shoulders stiff as his own. Then she extended her fingers, moving them slowly downward, till they touched his hand.

"Good-night, father," she said.

"Good-night, my child. Sleep well!" He took up his book.

She hesitated, waited, then drew away. Heavily she picked up her coat and crossed the room. At the door she stopped.

"Father —" she said. "Father — Good-night!"

But the words did not reach. Solny settled his glasses, leant back in his chair, and shifted the position of his book.

PART ONE—CHAPTER XVIII

THAT night Anna prayed carefully; but she knelt on the bare boards by the window where her eyes, resolutely wide open, could catch no glint of the carpet strip beside the bed.

Rising from her knees, she blew out the candle and undressed in the dark. Once between the sheets she slept, the heavy sleep of a mind and body worn out; though her eyelashes were wet and her breath, for many minutes, came long-drawn with the shudder of an underlying sob.

On waking the next morning she lay with closed eyes till the shock of recollection ran through her to her finger-tips, and she sprang out of bed.

In an instant she was by the window; the curtain was thrust back; and her glance, still dazed with sleep, was falling on the sky, on the murky roofs, on the first damp greyness of the day.

She shivered and rubbed her eyes; then silently crept to the door and listened. The house was still; her own breath, coming unevenly, was the only intimation of life. She turned back into the room and stood for a moment petrified by the isolation. Then from downstairs, harshly and stridently, the Dutch

clock struck six. She counted the strokes fearfully; as the last died out she stirred and looked down at her bare feet.

Her clothes lay within a yard of her. They lay precisely as they had lain morning after morning since first she had learnt to dress herself. Slowly she stretched out her fingers and felt them one by one; there was something ghostly and unreal in their touch. She shivered, drew a garment towards her, and mechanically began to dress.

The dressing was a slow affair. Her hands fumbled over buttons and halted at the tying of knots. She moved awkwardly, as if impelled by a force not quite her own. Even the shock of the cold water as she washed left her still benumbed.

Sitting on the edge of her bed, she combed and plaited her hair; then she rose, and lifting her hat from its peg, put it on. Her coat, still damp from last night's rain, was thrown across a chair; she took it up slowly, shook it and forced her arms through the tight sleeves. Then very silently she straightened herself and turned about — ready, save for her boots.

With the same slowness of motion, she took a step forward and placed her hands on the foot-rail of the bed, letting her gaze run furtively along the wall.

In the struggling light John Desinski's childish portrait of her stared at her with its questioning eyes. Dimly she could follow the tangle of the red hair, the soft outline of the face. She remembered the

day of its painting. How gay he had been! How amusing! What stories he had told to keep her still!

Her eyes stared back into the pictured eyes, and a void seemed suddenly to stretch before her. She shivered again, but her hands tightened on the rail and her eyes moved in their survey, travelling from one poor ornament to another with deliberate care. Then for a moment her lids drooped.

Until now she had guarded her glance; but now with a firm movement she raised her body, leant over the rail, and let her eyes rest long and steadily on the carpet beside the bed. It was the crucial test. In the glimmering light the blue and orange stood out with sharp distinctness; the pattern seemed cut as with a knife. She looked in perfect silence, as she might have looked on an unconscious animal. Her eyes smarted, her throat swelled. Then suddenly she dropped to the ground, picked up her boots, and carrying them in her hand, walked steadfastly to the door.

The door-handle turned with a creak that brought her heart to her lips; but she stepped across the landing. At the top of the stairs she paused, but the pause was momentary. At the third step she stopped and leant against the wall; the smarting behind her eyes had become a burning pain, an ache of parting no longer to be denied. Her whole form swayed backward with her impulse, but she caught herself in the nick of time. With a stealthy rush she began to descend the stairs.

At each crack and strain of the worn-out steps her breath caught; at each succeeding silence it was let go again.

From the attic Johann could hear nothing. Her father slept like the dead. She reiterated the knowledge silently again and again. Then at last the foot of the stairs was reached. There she stopped.

From the thought of the shop-door, with its bar and its cumbersome hinges, her mind drew back; instinctively it turned to the kitchen and the yard with their narrow entrance into the Passage; and almost without volition her decision was made.

Downstairs, the ticking of the clock filled all the spaces. The kitchen with its raked-out fire possessed a human loneliness. Its bare grey windows had the look of eyes; its familiar objects the sense of outstretched hands. She crept through hastily — the great eyes seemed to pierce her soul. The door into the yard was easy of management; the key turned smoothly, the latch lifted with scarcely a click, and the raw air poured through the aperture with a rush.

She stepped hastily out and drew the door behind her. Then she sat down upon the doorstep and pulled on her boots.

With the chill of the day the wave of her resolution receded, leaving a dull fear. A dazed, overwhelming loneliness seemed to lift from the enfolding gloom; her fingers fumbled with the boot-laces; her head drooped. Then suddenly she rose.

"I cannot! Oh, I cannot!" The words rushed out, inarticulate and vague. She laid her hand against the mouldering plaster of the house; but the crevices seemed to whisper back, echoing her words; the heavy shadows to combine and push her forth. She gripped the wall, but the plaster and the mould peeled off between the fingers in green strips.

In sudden panic she turned and raised the latch. Heedless of her boots upon the tiles, she re-crossed the kitchen floor. The dream that had wrapped her since her sleeping had dissolved. She was awake.

From the kitchen she passed into the parlour; there, too, were the staring windows and the raked-out fire. It was like walking through a house of death. The longing to call, to raise her voice till the whole house answered, filled her; but she gripped her hands and set her lips.

She walked across the room and laid her finger on the farther door; very gently she pushed it forward and the sparse light from the parlour window fell into the shop.

It fell on the counter, worn shiny by many hands; on the cobwebs, festooning the ceiling like dusty banners; on the ancient firearms and rusty swords.

She stared, holding her breath. She had never loved these things, but they had been her life; they had meant existence. She moved forward step by step.

For days — months — years to come they would remain unchanged. Morning after morning the

shutters would be taken down; morning after morning the dazzling daylight would pour in, like an invading army. Her father would take his position by the desk; Johann would take his place behind the counter; the quiet, uneventful round of barter would go on and on. Day after day — day after day. Only in the kitchen, in the parlour, in the little yard all would be still — quite still.

She closed her eyes, but with closed eyes the image of Johann, so frequently recurrent, rose painfully. She started alert again.

Johann would never understand. With a new confusion the new thought sprang up. Johann would think — She put her hand over her eyes. What would Johann think? Leaving like this — without a word — without a message — without good-bye!

Her eyes travelled down the counter, over a pile of military cloaks, then upward to the black slate and its recording chalk, hanging side by side upon the wall. How many games of "Noughts and Crosses" they had served for in childish days!

She stood with a dazed mind; her ideas rose and fell — each lifting itself to suffocate the last. Then with a little cry she sprang back, her hand upon the door. The silence had been rudely broken. The Dutch clock had struck again — seven inexorable beats.

In half an hour Johann would be downstairs. Even now he was awake. In sudden fear she drew back into the parlour; but she left the communication door ajar.

She glanced to the right, then to the left; she passed her hand again over her eyes. Then she raised her glance to the clock. It marked five minutes past the hour. Her feet seemed weighted to the floor; she feared to go; she dreaded to stay.

Without a word! Without good-bye! The thought rang through her confusion; swung to the ticking of the time.

Slowly, slowly she retraced her steps; slowly she passed into the shop and behind the counter; blindly she stumbled over the cloaks; then hesitatingly she stood before the slate. With her eyes on the ground she took up the chalk.

Her fingers were numb; her mind was numb; her hand poised itself irresolute.

Somewhere upstairs a chair was overturned. She jerked, and the chalk made a white line on the black surface. Shakingly she stiffened her wrist, wiped the slate, then began to write.

She wrote slowly, painfully, indistinctly; the letters were jagged and stiff.

"Anna will come back."

Then, without a glance at her work, without a backward look she replaced the chalk and walked into the parlour; from the parlour to the kitchen; from the kitchen into the yard; from the yard out into the street.

PART TWO—CHAPTER I

IT was an April day; a day of cool sunshine, budding leaves and promise. On either side of Mrs. Maxtead's hall-door was a narrow window; Branks, from his position in the hall, watched the ebb and flow of life through the glass. Looking to the left, he could scan the young green of the Park trees, and raising his glance could catch a glint of pale blue sky; but his eyes had an absent expression. One is apt to become absent when one has gazed on the same scene with small intermission for more than eight years. Not that Branks complained; his bread was buttered with a liberal hand, and he understood the value of butter to an ounce.

His eyes continued to skim the greenness; then verged to the nearer grey of the road with its jingling stream of vehicles; its bright, swift rush of life. London was filling; with every incoming train the flood of humanity thickened; with each new morning blinds were raised, tradesmen's ladders borne away, furniture resurrected from its holland coverings. The sense of a brilliant season was in the air.

Branks speculated on the point with lazy satisfaction. He was a little stouter, a little less supercilious

than in old days; time had dealt with him as it deals with a stone wall — smoothing his surface and rounding his corners. "In ten years," Mrs. Maxtead sometimes said, "Branks will be tolerable; in twenty he will be invaluable; in thirty —" But Branks was supremely unconscious of his promised fate.

He watched the flower-girl on the opposite pathway; he recognised an acquaintance on a passing brougham, and leant nearer to the glass; then all at once a gleam of genuine interest brightened his face and he stood upright.

"An 'ansom," he ejaculated, "at three in the afternoon." He looked at the hall clock to verify his impression, then his eyes returned to the window.

A second hansom, laden with luggage, had drawn up behind the first; then almost simultaneously, a third swayed into view; the curiosity in Branks's mind became almost a pain.

With a great shaking of harness and slipping of hoofs, the horses had pulled up. To Branks there was something almost portentous in the clatter of sound; he peered through the window, then caught his breath. A lady descended, paid the cabman, and turned to pat the horse. He felt his mouth gape.

Where had he seen her before? The question revolved slowly through his brain.

She was tall — taller for the straightness of her figure and the poise of her head; but she was something more; from the curve of her hat to her perfectly-shod feet she was distinguished, original,

striking. She wore a travelling-coat of dark sable and carried a bunch of violets in her hand.

Where had he seen her before? His dull mind was twisted by the question. The outline was so familiar, yet so unfamiliar, so tantalising, so aggravating. Then quite swiftly she turned, and he gasped in audible relief.

He remembered the portrait in the dining-room, the girl in the trailing muslin dress and wide-brimmed hat. Only yesterday his mistress had turned from a pile of newspapers and nodded to the picture. "The greatest actress in Europe, Branks!" she had said; and he had replied, "Yes, ma'am," in his most deferential tone.

With a flourish he threw the door wide.

The stranger ran up the steps; her lips were smiling, and her eyes seemed to reflect the smile.

"Branks!" she said, holding out her hand.

Branks drew back; custom and good training were strong within him; but the hand was still held out, and there is a charm before which the most perfect training in the world goes inevitably to the wall. With an awkward movement he advanced.

"Ma'am — miss —" He was somewhat incoherent. "We have heard of your success, miss. We all feel proud — if I might say."

She laughed, but her eyes darkened for a second.

"It's good to be home again, Branks. Where's Mrs. Maxtead? In her bedroom? All right; don't announce me. Just see to my boxes — and to

my maid; she 's somewhere in the third cab." She ran across the hall; but on the lowest step of the stairs she paused.

"Branks!"

"Yes, miss."

"Is Mrs. Maxtead's bedroom still white? In all the times I 've seen her, I 've never remembered to ask."

"The room is still white, miss."

"Ah!" She turned and flew up the stairs.

Mrs. Maxtead laid down her newspaper with the nearest approach to a start she had ever allowed herself.

"Anna!" she said sharply. "Anna — from the very skies!"

The girl crossed the room eagerly. "From nowhere so high, Jeanne." She bent laughingly and kissed the other's cheek.

Mrs. Maxtead, in her turn, laughed. "Listen to this — I was reading it as you opened the door. 'Mdlle. Solny, the young Parisian actress, contemplates a tour in Russia before opening her season in London in the middle of May.' A trifle inconsistent, eh?" She raised her brows.

Anna swept the sheets aside. "My dear Jeanne, who is ever consistent? Tell me, you are glad to see me?"

The other smiled again. "You know I never say things — saying is so bad for the imagination." But she pressed the girl's hand. "Make your explanations, Anna. Three weeks ago, in Vienna, you told me to

expect you four days before your opening night — not an hour sooner."

"I know. But a month ago, Jeanne. Things happen —" She took off her hat and threw it on the bed.

Her companion smiled again, a slightly ironical smile.

"Why do you smile?" Anna turned round.

"A reminiscence. You are very much — and very little — changed, in the eight years."

Anna threw back her head. "Don't talk of that. Ask me why I came."

"I have asked."

There was a pause.

"How lovely of you to have a fire!" Anna crossed the room and knelt on the white rug. "I've been praying for an English spring and an English fire for four years." She bent close to the blaze and the flames lit up her face. After a moment's wait she turned round.

"It was two nights ago at the Archduchess's, Jeanne; Elslen had been singing — you know how her singing seems to tighten round one's heart. I was standing by myself — thinking — making impossible dreams —" She laughed a little and picked up the bunch of violets that she had dropped a second before. "Old Prince Roxoff came to me — sometimes he has a very gentle manner — and he said quite softly, 'They tell me, Mademoiselle, that you are going home.' In themselves the words were

nothing; but they fell at the right moment; they touched something here — " She put her fingers to her throat. "I suddenly realised, Jeanne, how hollow it all was — this trip to Russia — this going home — a country I did n't remember, a people I did n't know. It all came in an instant — the necessity — the void. In the whole crowd about me, each person had a place to turn to — one little spot to call his own. The feeling was very strong, Jeanne; my thoughts flew straight back here — " She stopped.

Mrs. Maxtead came to her and laid her hand gently on her arm. "You were quite right, Anna, quite wise; your home is with me, here with me." She paused for a moment to stroke the girl's hand. "Sometimes, just sometimes, I have feared — "

Anna put up her hand.

"Not to-day!" She smelt the violets; then sprang up. "Jeanne, I won't be serious on my first day. Let's gossip. What do you do to-night?"

"To-night? Oh, I am 'at home' to-night."

Anna clasped her hands. "How fine! Will there be a crowd? I thirst to meet a London crowd; to hear English spoken by every living soul. Oh, but you can't quite understand!" Her eyes shone. "May I ring and order tea? I like things at unreasonable hours."

"My dear child, how thoughtless of me!" Mrs.

Maxtead crossed the room, but with her finger on the bell, she turned.

"Anna."

"Yes."

"I 'm not quite certain about to-night."

"Oh, Jeanne." The girl's voice fell.

"I have planned your first appearance in London, your first introduction to London, so many times. It has been one of my schemes. It was to be brilliant — in every sense."

"I 'm tired of brilliance."

"I am not tired of brilliance for you." In eight years the voice had lost nothing of its ring.

Anna frowned; then laughed. "Would you send me to bed, like a naughty child?"

"Possibly." Mrs. Maxtead was speculative; then swiftly, with a flash of energy, she moved back to the centre of the room. "My dear Anna, what are you thinking of? What are you dreaming of? You forget that the very hoardings in the streets talk of your coming. You will be a nine days' wonder when you are first seen."

Anna arranged her violets. "I 'd gladly postpone the nine days' wonder. But, Jeanne, I do want to meet your guests; I do want to listen to the crowd."

"My dear child — "

Anna moved quickly forward; there was colour in her face and her eyes gleamed. "Jeanne," she said suddenly, "I have an inspiration. I have an idea. You say yourself that I am unknown here — that

I've not been seen. Let me enjoy the blessing? Let's forget engagements and triumphs and sensations just for once — let me be your *protégée* — just your *protégée* returned from abroad? The chances are twenty to one, a hundred to one, that I sha'n't be recognised. I can wear a white frock and a string of pearls. I can look nineteen. Jeanne — "

The appeal was irresistible. Mrs. Maxtead's lips tightened, then relaxed; at last she laughed.

"And the great Solny — ?" she said.

"Will give her understudy a chance. I take the responsibility, Jeanne. I'll sit in the darkest corner, and be the least attractive woman in the room."

The other looked at her; then her lips fell to their old satirical curve. "The corner will have to be very dark," she said dryly; and re-crossing the room, she pressed the bell.

PART TWO—CHAPTER II

AFTER dinner, Mrs. Maxtead rose and slipped her arm through Anna's.

"Come upstairs," she said. "It 's only nine; I like an hour in my own room before the storm bursts."

They both laughed and moved across the room, then crossing the hall, slowly ascended the stairs.

In the bedroom the fire had been replenished; otherwise the room was dark. Anna crossed to the window and drew the curtains back. The sky was clear and studded with stars; the moon, in its first quarter, hung above the opposite trees; against the dark roadway the cab lamps made a stream of flitting lights. She looked in silence for a while; then quite abruptly she spoke.

"I am breaking my own precepts, Jeanne."

Mrs. Maxtead was holding a match to the tall candles on the dressing-table. "In what?" she asked.

"I wanted to be shallow to-night, and my mind will be perverse, and think."

"Come away from the window, then. The stars are always demoralising."

"Which makes them all the more irresistible. What were you going to say to-day when I stopped you?"

"Nothing worth remembering." Mrs. Maxtead studied a candle-flame.

"Ah!" Anna's voice dropped. "It's the things not worth remembering that come out and haunt one in the night. Don't you find it so?"

"My dear child, so few people see ghosts since bromides came into fashion."

Anna laughed a little. "But, Jeanne, how much we change! Once I used to believe in facing things; now, at the first glimpse of an unpleasantness, I shut my eyes and turn my back. Is that very weak?"

"It's very foolish. Look an enemy in the face and he will turn tail."

"That sounds so easy and so nice." She leant her forehead against the glass and looked up at the sky. "Enemies go, but facts stick. I know; I have tried."

"Then you did n't look straight enough."

There was a pause. The figures across the way glided together, passed and re-passed; the cab lights danced by; the leaves of the trees stirred in the faint wind.

Mrs. Maxtead crossed the room and stood by the girl's side. In the glow of the candles, one saw the touch of grey in her brown hair, the faint lines about her eyes and mouth; but in the shadow of the window, only her hands, untouched by time, and

her slight alert figure were apparent to the glance. She stood as she might have stood eight years before; when she spoke, it was in the same voice, with the same precision, the same inflexibly assured ring.

"Anna," she said, "you think I don't see your thoughts. I am looking into them as if they were a pool of water where I could see every shred of moss and every tiny stone. This is a difficult moment for you; you must make it a successful one. Take this ghost of yours and kill it outright; make an end of it, once for all. You have rolled it into a grave and strewn earth over it, then you have run away; and all the time — sleeping and waking, resting and working — you have the thought that it 's not dead, that at any moment it can shake off the earth and rise — "

Anna put out her hand. "Stop, Jeanne. I won't listen; I won't hear."

There was a long wait; then she turned suddenly and caught the other's hand. "Jeanne, what a fool I am! I'm thirsting to hear — thirsting to speak — and you know I am." She freed her hand again, and pushed back her hair.

Mrs. Maxtead was silent.

"When you took me away, eight years ago, I wrote a letter every day, to Johann or to my father — letters pages long, letters of explanation, of affection, of homesickness, and I stored them away, promising myself to post them in five years' time. The posting was to be my first act of emancipation — my first act; I saw myself running through the

streets with the bundle in my hand; I saw myself as I heard it drop into the letter box. I have cried night after night, Jeanne, at the length of those five debarred years; I have waked morning after morning, with a prayer of thankfulness that another day was gone." She turned to the window. "But that was eight years ago — eight whole years ago. In the second year I wrote my letters every week instead of every day; in the third, I wrote them every month — and not always every month; in the fourth, I ceased to write at all." She stopped.

"At the end of the fifth year — oh, you knew the world very well, Jeanne; you had calculated very well — at the end of the fifth year, on the day of my triumph at the Conservatoire, you came to me and reminded me that our old bargain was ended and our new bargain was to begin,— that I was a woman, free to do what I liked with my own life. You were quite frank, quite generous — I think you guessed how safe the generosity was. And I — what did I do? Where were my resolutions and my promises to myself? With my ambition on fire and my conceit running riot, I went to my own room, locked the door, and burnt the letters one by one. You never knew how well you scored — you and the world!" She laughed with a catch in her voice.

Mrs. Maxtead's glance was fixed on the sky with its light of misted stars. Presently she lowered her lids. "And now — ?" she said.

"Now?" Anna lifted her head. "There's no '*now*,' Jeanne — for that. I have learnt the lesson very well; something seems dead here — " She touched her heart. "Sometimes I think 't will never wake up again. The time is gone when I could say 'I hate you! I hate you!' as I once said. I have grown blunt; I see through you now, Jeanne; I understand you; but I can't say 'I hate you!' any more. You are a part of the world, and I 've grown to like the world — its good things — its ease and its success. When the old days come back, I shut my eyes; I can't look them in the face and deny them, as you would do; I can't look them in the face and acknowledge them; so I take the middle course, I shut my eyes. Jeanne — " She looked suddenly into the other's face. "Jeanne, let me keep my eyes shut — ?" She raised her hand again with the old childish gesture, and pushed back her hair; then she shivered slightly and turned to the window.

Mrs. Maxtead moved softly into the room and set a light to the groups of candles hanging from the wall. Then she walked back to Anna and touched her arm.

The girl started, wheeled about, then laughed nervously.

"Oh, the lights! What a charm against bad thoughts! You are very — comprehending, Jeanne." She laughed again unevenly; and Mrs. Maxtead drew the curtains across the window.

Anna walked to the fireplace, then to the dressing-table. "Look!" she said. "I've tangled my pearls. Help me to get them right?"

The other came forward, and they stood together in the circle of light. In a moment her fingers had unloosed the knot; then she raised her head and caught their reflections side by side in the glass. Her own figure in its black dress, her own face with its tiny, inexorable lines, her hair coiled to show almost ostentatiously the light patch of grey; and the girlish figure half a head taller than her own, the slim neck, the straight white dress, perfect in its simple lines. With great deliberation she raised her eyes inch by inch, till, with a little shock, their glances met in the glass.

Anna stirred. The other laughed sharply and turned away.

"I must rush! I believe I hear the first carriage. Wait here, Anna, for the present; in half an hour, when the crowd begins to thicken, slip downstairs; I'll save somebody nice for you till then." She laughed again and moved to the door; with her fingers on the handle she turned back.

"There's a better charm against bad thoughts than light, Anna."

Anna raised her head. "What's that?"

"Youth." With a swish of her skirts, Mrs. Maxtead shut the door.

PART TWO—CHAPTER III

FOR long after her hostess left her, Anna stood by the dressing-table. From downstairs a faint murmur reached her — the jingling echo of traffic borne through the open door into the hall, the hum of laughter and voices, the pulsation and rustle and movement that denotes arriving guests. She heard it mechanically, as one hears the roar of a storm while absorbed in the reading of a book; then, as when a wilder gust of wind shakes the house, one sometimes shuts the book, she broke the thread of her musings and raised her head, attracted by a fresh sound. The swing of music, low but unmistakable, came across the room.

She stood upright and her face brightened; it was a gay, inconsequent tune, a waltz she had danced to countless times. It roused her, stirred her; unconsciously she walked to the door and opened it a little way; the rush of existence became audible again, running below the music in faint accompaniment. Cautiously she stepped across the corridor and looked over the stairs.

The scene was bright. Against the dark carpeting, the glimmer of jewels and the soft tones of women's dresses made a glow and patch of colour; from between the palms of the inner hall the waltz floated

up inspiritingly; she caught the light scrape of the violins, the deeper throb of the 'cello. With a sudden impulse she turned again and passed back into the room.

Crossing to the dressing-table, she stood before the glass and studied her reflection while a minute passed; with subdued excitement she caught up two candlesticks and raised them till the light fell full upon her face; then, silently replacing them, she picked up her gloves, and hummed the tune of the waltz as she drew them on. A second later she left the room, descended by a side staircase, and stood in momentary hesitation by the door of the reception-room.

The reception-room was the largest in the house, and, to Anna, the least familiar. In former days its polished floor, its panels and gilding, its furniture of Louis XVI., had each in turn been a source of awe. She smiled a little now, as she remembered how large they once had loomed; then a glimpse of her hostess's black dress caught her eye, and she crossed the room.

Mrs. Maxtead was standing in a quiet corner; a tall screen served the double purpose of a background and a partial shield. As Anna approached, she was leaning back against it, her eyes lowered, her fan swaying gently, as she talked to her companion, a young man with a straight, slight figure and an attentive pose of the head. She looked round with a smile as the girl reached her.

"You've chosen a good moment," she said. "I'm taking temporary shelter. The hurricane was pretty bad." She laughed; then her gaze narrowed to the girl's face. "But what have you been doing? Your eyes look like big stars."

Anna laughed and blushed. "I have been studying charms as propounded by you — " She caught the stranger's eye and stopped.

Mrs. Maxtead laid her fingers on her arm. "Anna, I've always wanted you to know Mr. Strode. May I introduce him now?"

Anna smiled and the stranger bowed. There was courteous deference in his bearing, vitality and strength in the clearness of his eyes and the healthy tan of his skin. She was noting each item when Mrs. Maxtead spoke again.

"Mr. Strode is favoured by Fate," she said. "He is delightful by nationality. Half his life has been spent in Canada, half in Cornwall; he can express an Englishman's sincerity with an American's charm."

Anna smiled again, and Strode laughed.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that Mrs. Maxtead's rather like a lightning flash. She drops into dingy corners, then imagines they were never dark." His voice was easy and assured, his manner had a faint deliberation, his eyes an attentive way of resting on his listener's face that marked him from other men.

Involuntarily Anna returned his glance. "Jeanne has the secret of popularity," she said; "she sees people as they would be seen."

"Which implies — ?" His lips took a humorous turn.

Before she could answer, Mrs. Maxtead bent forward and touched her arm. "My dear, good people, you must find your implications for yourselves. I see a new arrival." She swept away from them, then turned with a characteristic smile. "Popularity is an invalid that requires a good deal of nursing, Anna," she said, with a little nod.

Strode laughed as she disappeared in the crowd. "A brilliant woman is rather wonderful," he said slowly, "but I don't think that I'd care to marry one. 'T would be like living in a conservatory — the temperature always abnormal and always artificial; one would grow afraid to open the door."

Anna looked across the screen to the gay groups beyond. Her lips were parted, her eyes shone; she felt an exhilaration in this stranger's presence, — his youth, his health, his quiet assurance, all affected her. He typified a new civilisation — he was the product of a newer world, where the worn-out and the incapable move to the wall; where the race, and the prize of the race, are to the few and the strong. She turned to him, unconsciously speaking her thought.

"I fancy you would open any door," she said quickly; "I don't picture you trembling on the inner side."

He smiled. "That 's very charming of you; but I don't quite know that I deserve it all. It 's difficult to measure oneself, don't you think?"

She looked again across the room.

"I hardly know; at best of times, it's an unpleasant process — one generally finds oneself so very small. But let us talk of something else." She turned once more and met his eyes, and the contact gave her an unlooked-for thrill. "Have you known Jeanne for long? Are you one of the set?" She indicated the groups with a movement of her fan.

He laughed. "Oh, absolutely not. I'm an outsider — an off-season friend. When Mrs. Maxtead comes to Trescar, she takes compassion upon me. We are neighbours there, you know. From the tower of my house I can see the woodbine climbing round her chimney-stacks. We introduced ourselves on the strength of that woodbine." He laughed again.

"But I thought Jeanne said Canada?" She raised her eyes.

"She said Cornwall as well." He smiled. "I lived at Trescar till I was fifteen years old; then my father died, and my uncle in Canada thought that trade in a new country was better for me than tradition in an old, and I was shipped to America much against my will. I was twenty-one before I saw home again. You can guess I counted the years."

Anna looked down critically at her gloves. "You returned when you came of age?"

"I sailed on my birthday." He laughed. "I'm

afraid I rather stick at things; no place will ever be quite Cornwall to me; I look to returning permanently one day, — when my pile is made." He laughed once more.

"And in the mean time?" Anna smoothed her gloves.

"Oh, in the mean time, I grind hard at copper-mining, and when trade and my uncle can spare me, I run across. But why do you never come to Trescar? Don't you like the sea?"

She looked up quickly. "I loved the sea before I ever saw it; now it is a sort of fetish to me. But I've never seen Trescar — or Jeanne's White Cottage. Like you, I've been out of England for many years."

"Studying?"

"Studying." She smoothed her glove again; then again she looked up. "Yes; also like you, I want to make my fortune some day — some distant day. For the present I'm content to hear other people talk of theirs."

There was a pause; scraps of conversation floated to them, the sound of passing skirts on the opposite side of the screen, the sway of the music from the hall outside. Strode moved nearer to her by a step.

"I wish you'd come to Cornwall," he said impulsively. "I don't know why, but I feel we'd grow to know each other there. There's something about the sea that levels things — prejudice and formality

and things." He stopped and smoothed his faultlessly smooth hair. His speech had the slight mannerism, his voice the deliberate intonation that in the new country the Englishman endeavours to acquire and the American does his best to discard.

Anna looked at him. "That 's very true," she said. "I 've often thought it, but I 've never put it in quite that way. The sea has a wonderful power."

"Yes. Like some people, it takes one out of oneself. Do you know that we 've been standing here for half an hour?"

She glanced round and coloured. "No; when one is interested I suppose one forgets." Her eyes were very bright.

"Precisely. Would I be trespassing if I asked you to come and find a seat — somewhere outside the crowd? Be quite candid in your answer; I come from a country where people mostly say exactly what they mean." He paused, waiting for her reply, and it struck her that no man had ever looked her so honestly in the eyes. A wave of life, of exhilaration, of youth swept across her; she returned his glance with a smile.

"Jeanne says that candour is worse than crime," she said. "Whose dogma shall I follow? Hers or yours?" Her eyes gleamed.

Involuntarily Strode came nearer still. "Do neither. Let me answer for you."

The room was brilliantly lighted; against the darkness of the screen his face showed up refined and reliant. Anna opened and shut her fan.

"And what would the answer be?" She laughed a little, but unconsciously her voice dropped.

He laughed as well; then bowed gravely. "'T would be just this —" He offered her his arm.

PART TWO—CHAPTER IV

MRS. MAXTEAD sat before her bedroom fire. It was well past two o'clock, but as yet her only attempt at retiring for the night had consisted of drawing off all her rings and making them into a little heap. A cup of black coffee stood on a table by her side, and against the saucer rested a half-burnt cigarette.

On her face was an expression of expectation — an expectation that settled into quiet certainty when the handle of her door was softly turned and someone came into the room. She made no attempt to raise her head or to look behind; but with a faint movement that was satisfaction and decision in one, she let the rings slip to her lap and brought her finger-tips together.

Anna came silently across the room. She was wrapped in a Chinese robe with a fantastic pattern in gold, and wore slippers of Oriental make. She crossed the room and laid her hands on Mrs. Maxtead's shoulders; then her eyes fell on the coffee-cup and she smiled.

"Coffee and cigarettes at two in the morning! How many women would be sipping hot water and preparing for a day in bed!"

Mrs. Maxtead laughed her satirical laugh. "Days in bed make me realise the grave." She gave a little shiver. "As for hot water — I never could tolerate it outside my bath." She lifted the coffee-cup to her lips, and laying it down, picked up the cigarette and tossed it into the fire.

"But I've come to a conclusion concerning you, Anna. Sit on the ground and lean against my knees."

Anna gathered her wrapper about her and obeyed. To sit on the ground before a fire and gaze into the blaze charmed her now as much as it had ever done. It was her most confidential, her most familiar, pose, and long ago Mrs. Maxtead had gauged its worth.

For a moment they both followed the play of the firelight on the dark blue and gold of the girl's robe; then the silence fell away.

"Your conclusion, Jeanne? I am curious."

Mrs. Maxtead made a tower of her rings, then tossed it down again. "To-night passed," she said, "but it can't be repeated. You 're too conspicuous — no, that 's a hateful word: you 're too original for London, Anna. The dark corners are too few."

"Jeanne, how inhospitable — how very horrid of you!" Anna raised her eyes.

"How considerate of me!" She touched the girl's cheek. "My dear child, something must be arranged In three days people will be talking; in a week you will be recognised in a whispering, half-hearted way, and the big splash that I have promised myself will degenerate into a little ring of bubbles.

I can't have that, you know. I can't have it!" She straightened herself.

A moment followed in which the words died away; then, half humorously and half seriously, Anna set her lips.

"I won't leave England, Jeanne; it 's no use."

A faint amused gleam crossed the other's eyes. "England — or London?" she asked below her breath.

Anna hesitated; then unaccountably blushed. "England — I think."

Mrs. Maxtead leant back in her chair; she seemed to make deductions and calculations that were not unpleasant to her mind; when at last she half raised her lids and spoke again, her voice had its old silky tone.

"You 've heard me speak of Trescar, Anna?"

The girl moved slightly. Her fingers carefully outlined a gold dragon that stretched across her robe.

Her companion almost smiled.

"Have you ever thought of Cornwall as a place of interest? Of course the sea there is n't like the sea at Naples, but still —" She let her voice drop.

Anna bent over her task; she was absorbed in the curves of the dragon's tail.

"There is a great slope of rock at Trescar and a stretch of heather, and rather a picturesque view. I forget whether you like views."

With a twist of the wrist Anna finished trac-

ing the tail; then, smiling irresistibly, she turned round.

"Jeanne, what are you driving at?"

For a space Mrs. Maxtead looked at the fire in silence; then, against her will, she responded to the smile.

"My dear Anna, it is not artistic to be so abrupt. I'm driving at a proposition; I'm trying to make concessions." She paused a little; then leant forward, speaking fast. "If I cancel all my engagements for three weeks, will you come with me to Cornwall to-morrow? Stay with me there as long as I like, put everything into my hands to manage as I think best?"

"Which means a little quiet, and eventually, the splash?" Anna made a slight grimace.

"Precisely."

They both laughed; then the girl put up her hand. "Spatter the whole town if you like, Jeanne; I don't mind." For a second their fingers touched, and there was something of understanding, something of sympathy in the silent pressure; then, gathering her rings into a little heap, Mrs. Maxtead slowly rose.

She leant against the mantel-shelf and stood looking down. "Has Prince Roxoff asked you to marry him since that night at the Opera?"

"Twice since that night." Anna looked intently into the fire. "Do you call me a fool, Jeanne? A man of seventy-four, with provinces in three countries." She laughed a little ironically.

Mrs. Maxtead picked up a polishing-pad and began to rub her nails.

"A man with three provinces is apt to have superfluous possessions," she said dryly. "No. I'm inclined to call you wise. The right man, Anna, will have a good deal more than three provinces — and a good deal less, it seems to me." Her bright eyes scanned the girl's face. "Now run along to bed. To-morrow morning we'll talk business in the study; to-morrow evening at Trescar we'll begin to forget that business exists. Good-night!" She bent lightly and kissed the girl's cheek.

Anna rose. For a space she stood stroking a fold of her robe; then she looked up. "I came to say a lot of things, Jeanne; now they somehow won't get said."

Mrs. Maxtead was intent upon her nails. "Somehow I think I understand." Her voice had a quizzical turn.

Anna smiled and moved towards the door; halfway across the room she stopped.

"Jeanne."

"Yes."

"Mr. Strode will be at Trescar."

After the words came a little pause; then with a delightful assumption of vagueness, Mrs. Maxtead raised her head.

"Maurice?" She hesitated. "Oh, of course, Maurice Strode."

Anna blushed. "Yes; the American; the man who was here to-night. I only wanted to say that

he has got the ridiculous idea into his head that I am a relation — a cousin, or something, of yours."

Mrs. Maxtead returned to the polishing of her nails. "We can easily undeceive him on that score, if that is all."

"Of course." Anna's voice was not enthusiastic. She took a few steps forward, then paused afresh.

"Jeanne."

"Yes."

"It 's rather nice to be talked to — to be liked, you know, just for oneself."

"So I have always found."

"You are exasperating!"

Mrs. Maxtead laughed very softly. Anna took two steps onward, then paused for a third time.

"Jeanne."

"Well?"

"Would it be very wrong — would it matter much — if I stayed your cousin for the three weeks?" Her eyes were bright as they had been when she stood behind the screen; there was a new quick excitement in her voice.

Her companion noted both, though her head was bent. When she raised her eyes, there was unmistakable laughter in their depths.

"That depends on Maurice Strode's sense of right and wrong," she said dryly, "not upon mine. But I dare say we can work it, if you really like."

PART TWO—CHAPTER V

MRS. MAXTEAD leant back against a comfortably curved rock and shifted her white parasol till its shadow fell across her book; for ten minutes she read on without raising her head.

The corner was unique: on either hand rose rocks of varied shape, lichened to rust-colour and black and grey; behind, the cliff loomed up, a guarding wall of gorse and bracken, crossed by a thread-like path; and straight in front, immense, superb, illimitable, stretched the sea and sky — the one a haze of mauve, the other a sweep of blue, the two blended and toned and merged in a mist of light bronze; while above all, fulfilment of the morning's promise, surety for the coming night, hovered the stillness, the breathlessness that belongs so absolutely and so exquisitely to one hour in the twenty-four.

Suddenly Mrs. Maxtead shut her book. "What a glare!" she said. "With a little imagination, one might conjure Egypt. Sixpence for your thoughts, Anna!"

Anna stirred luxuriously. She lay at full length on the strip of grass that the nook afforded; her hat was off, her hands clasped behind her head; her eyes,

wide open in deep enjoyment, seemed to reflect the beauty of both sea and sky. "I'm not thinking, Jeanne, I'm realising." She unclasped her hands and clasped them again, for the mere pleasure of the act.

Mrs. Maxtead looked towards the horizon with amused eyes. "Women should never realise."

Anna smiled. "Women should never moralise — at the sea. If one has a good hour, why should n't one appreciate it? I don't like to put my finger on a thing and say, 'This will be mine to-morrow,' or 'This was mine yesterday;' I like to catch it quite tight and say, 'This is mine now — to-day.'"

"You tempt Fate when you say that."

"Pessimist!" She laughed; then in a moment her manner changed and she turned round. "Jeanne," she said, "I've suddenly realised how much I owe to you. First you taught me how to walk through the world without cutting my feet or losing my way; and now, when my feet begin to sound just ever so little hollow to my own ears, you whisk me away, draw back the big dividing curtain, and give me a glimpse into heaven — all rest and sea and sun, with no parts, no popularity, no people to get in one's way and breathe up one's air."

Mrs. Maxtead looked down at her book; the corners of her mouth were ever so slightly raised. "No people, Anna — ?"

The girl coloured. "How horribly literal you are! People, of course — in their proper places."

Mrs. Maxtead shut her parasol with a good deal of elaboration. "I should rather like to understand," she said.

"You know very well what I mean. The village people in the dear little straggling village; the fishermen mending their nets and tarring their boats; old Treherne up at the Cottage trying to find weeds in the flower-beds on the lawn — "

Mrs. Maxtead suddenly raised her head.

"— And Maurice Strode everywhere," she said. "I imagine I understand."

Anna sat straight up. "That's the first tactless thing I've known you to say, Jeanne."

The other smiled with serene good-humour. "It is hard to be truthful and tactful both."

Anna took her chin in her hand, and gazed before her at the sea. "It has n't even the excuse of truth."

"No?"

"No."

Mrs. Maxtead narrowed her eyes in calculation. "We came here in the middle of April," she said, "and it is now the beginning of May. I may be wrong, but I cannot recall three consecutive hours of any day in which we have not seen Maurice Strode. Of course I may be wrong — "

Anna watched the sea deepen from azure to steel, and as she watched, a change passed across her face, her expressions wavered and moved like clouds before the wind; the frown between her eyebrows smoothed

itself away; the flush on her cheeks paled a little; at last she smiled.

"Jeanne," she said, turning with a sudden impulse, "why is it that one can never be really angry with you?"

Mrs. Maxtead moved her parasol as she might have shrugged her shoulders. "One does n't lose one's temper with a gnat because it stings. But you are slipping past the point, and the point interests me. When two women accept a man when he is present, and combine to ignore him when he is absent, it means that one of the two takes him seriously. Now I have n't taken a man seriously for thirteen years. What am I to conclude?"

"That all theories are fallible." Anna laughed hastily and covered her cheek with her hand.

There was a silence, in which the girl sat preternaturally still, while her companion plucked three grasses and began to plait them with distracting care.

"Talking of theories," she said at length, "I wonder how Maurice will take his enlightening?"

"His enlightening — ?" Anna turned round.

"The sorting of his ideas, if you like it better. I wonder how my little cousin with her simple manners and her linen frocks will expand into Solny, who has set the fashion in shoes and scent for three Parisian seasons — whose cast-off flowers are worth five times their weight in gold — whose hats three painters have made famous — ?" She

paused between every phrase, arranging her blades of grass.

A wave of colour spread across Anna's face. "I think Mr. Strode will understand; he is a gentleman."

The other laughed. "Man is an older word than gentleman, Anna; and man is a conservative animal." She stopped.

Anna rose and leant against the rock; the sun had fallen palpably; the first faint shadow of the evening crept across the cliff with a little chill. She shivered, then laughed, but some of the spontaneity was lacking in the laugh. "We are changing places," she said. "You are getting sentimental and I serious; it s time we were getting home."

"We dine with Maurice to-night."

"I know." She picked up her hat. "How persistent you are, Jeanne!"

Mrs. Maxtead unloosed her grasses and began plaiting them again. "Persistence is a jewel," she said, "if one learns how to polish it. In looking at Maurice's face, what strikes you most?"

"Nothing." Anna arranged her hat.

"Anna!"

"Oh, well — his eyes; the horribly steady look about his eyes." She spoke with a little rush.

Mrs. Maxtead nodded once or twice as she completed her task. "Anna," she said tentatively, "have you ever noticed that men with those eyes — those horribly steady eyes — can be somewhat hard to handle — a little restive on occasion?"

Anna's lips took on an obdurate curve. "Perhaps I 'm dense, Jeanne; I confess I don't understand." She straightened her shoulders and lifted her head.

Mrs. Maxtead smiled very gently to herself and rose. One by one, she collected her cushions, then she rolled her parasol and began her ascent of the cliff; a yard or two up the narrow path she paused.

"Are n't you coming?" she said. "There are honey cakes for tea."

Anna turned. "Jeanne," she said below her breath.

The other balanced herself neatly, and looked down with a cheerful smile.

"Yes — ?"

Their eyes met and there was a pause; then Anna blushed.

"Jeanne, you have been very painstaking — and I have been very detestable. Let me carry your rug?"

PART TWO—CHAPTER VI

ON their arrival that night, Strode met them in the hall. They had lunched with him twice, and once they had strolled across from the Cottage at tea-time and had been shown over the whole rambling house, from the dining-room with its oak settles and rafters to the tower at the eastern angle; but they had never dined with him before.

The dinner was an epoch. Strode had felt it as he dressed; he had felt it as he paced the terrace, a cigar between his lips, his eyes on the White Cottage; and he realised it with something of a shock as he held Anna's hand for a moment and saw that the cottons and muslins had been set aside for something that shimmered softly like the leaf of a rose. He felt the change with a subtle physical thrill, and involuntarily his fingers tightened upon hers.

"This is very good of you," he said gently; then he turned to Mrs. Maxtead with a smile.

"I've been dreading your wrath all day," he began, as they crossed the hall to the drawing-room beyond, "I've had a real bad afternoon."

"Poor Maurice! What's happened? Your cook mutinied?"

"Worse. You see, three people can't dine together —"

"Of course not."

"If you're sarcastic, I'm going to stop."

"My dear boy, I'm earnest to depression. Please go on."

"Well, there had to be a man to make a fourth." They entered the drawing-room.

Anna laughed. "What it is to have a reputation, Jeanne!"

Mrs. Maxtead walked to a mirror. "Would you say that Maurice was thinking quite absolutely of me? But who is this mysterious individual?"

"I'm afraid to tell you."

"Rake up your courage! All men are alike to me."

"But you have antipathies."

"So have cats. Be quick!"

Strode smoothed his hair whimsically. "I'll put it in the form of a riddle. What comes nearest to death?"

"Doctors," responded Mrs. Maxtead promptly.

Strode laughed. "Right! You've struck the fourth guest. It's the doctor from Cavely; a very decent chap, who's driving fourteen miles for the pleasure of meeting you. Just appreciate that."

Mrs. Maxtead waited to touch her hair, then she looked round. "I'll smell chloroform every time I look at him; and I know I shall watch him cut up his meat."

Strode's lips twitched. "There's a game called playing with fire."

She picked up a book.

Anna was smelling a jar of pot-pourri; she raised her eyes, gleaming with amusement, and met Strode's glance. "You can always think, Jeanne, that it might have been an undertaker."

"Doctor Penrhyn!" announced a servant from the door.

The dinner was a success. Strode's spirits were unquenchable; Mrs. Maxtead excelled herself, spurred to unusual height by the presence of the new guest; and Anna, from the moment of the first course, ate and laughed and talked as if life held no other obligation.

The food and wines were good. A heavy iron lamp, hanging from the ceiling, cast a glow upon the cloth, and a bank of scarlet flowers in the centre of the table made a patch of colour. Everything suggested brightness and light; and the *entrée* had been served and removed before the first pause broke the run of talk. The pause was momentary — one of those silences that no one feels and from which conversation flowed on afresh, with fresh impetus; but short as was its duration, it was long enough for one circumstance, long enough to give Anna's imagination time to wake. When Doctor Penrhyn, raising his head, turned to Mrs. Maxtead with a new question, the girl's eyes were on the flowers by

her plate, her thoughts for the instant concentrated on herself.

Never before had life moved with such precision; never till to-night had her heart throbbed so steadily, her senses seemed so accurate, her comprehension so clear. It was a conscious awakening, a fusion of thoughts by which the heaven of which she had spoken that afternoon became an attainable fact, beckoning her with tangible hands. Six steps forward, a jerk of the arm, and it seemed that the heavy curtain would drop into its place, shutting out care and the dun-coloured world, leaving her, and perhaps one other, on the inner golden side. She looked up suddenly and met Strode's eyes.

A servant, bending over her shoulder, filled her glass; her gaze dropped to the wine with its cloud of bubbles; then Mrs. Maxtead's laugh and Mrs. Maxtead's voice reached her across the table, bringing back material things.

"Theories are very well," she was saying, "but one can only theorise, after all."

"Don't you think that that depends on the basis of the theory?" Penrhyn laid down his glass.

"Oh, I know all that." She waved her hand. "Science should be the backbone of conjecture."

"Quite so." Penrhyn smiled. "But to return to the starting of our argument. Genius is abnormal, therefore I hold genius must act abnormally at some period of its career. Don't you agree with that, Strode?"

Strode was speaking to a servant. Anna looked up interestedly.

"You think excessive brain means eccentricity?" she said.

"Not as you understand the word." He smiled indulgently. "I don't mean that a genius must eat like a savage or forget to wash. I believe that for ten years, for twenty years, a genius may act like an ordinary human being, but at the end of those years I believe the abnormality would break out."

Anna laughed. "In what form?" she asked.

"Oh, the form would depend upon chance. The form of a crime, the form of an act of folly, any form you like to name. But it's only a theory, as Mrs. Maxtead says; you can refute it if you like." He picked up his glass again.

"Hallo, Penrhyn! Talking of geniuses in Mrs. Maxtead's presence?" Strode turned back to the table with a laugh. "In town, they tell me that she deals in them — buys and sells them by the ton. Ask her for her opinion, don't offer yours — you'll find yourself in the wrong street."

Penrhyn's face expressed astonishment. He looked from Mrs. Maxtead to Strode, from Strode back again.

Mrs. Maxtead laughed. "You are unfair, Maurice; you know that I bar trade the moment I put my foot on Cornish soil."

Penrhyn bent forward. "For the sake of the theorists, Mrs. Maxtead."

"Just to score off the theorists." Strode laughed again.

Anna fingered her glass; her eyes were on her friend's face.

Mrs. Maxtead cast her one glance, swiftly satirical and reassuring, then she turned to Strode.

"When Doctor Penrhyn goes out to dinner, Maurice, he leaves his medical appliances in the consulting-room. I claim the same grace. Am I within my rights, Doctor Penrhyn?" She looked round with a bright smile.

Penrhyn bowed solemnly and they all laughed. For Anna, there was a moment of unaccountably swift relief. Then, with a change of course, the talk flowed on again into a new groove.

The rest of the dinner sped on very light wings; and when the end came, it was with a distinct sense of well-being that they pushed back their chairs and rose. A waft of air, faintly cool, met them at the door of the drawing-room; one of the long windows stood ajar, and the fine scent of mignonette blew in, mingled with sweet-briar.

Anna crossed directly to the window, and Strode followed; for a moment they stood silently looking out. A hundred yards below the terrace they could hear the sea pounding against the rocks; near at hand they could see the lawn with its glistening moisture and plot of flowers; half-way between the two, they could follow the high-rose hedge, already astar with buds. Presently, following a frank impulse, Anna turned.

"Doesn't it seem a shame to leave it all in three little miserable days?"

"In three days? But I thought —"

She smiled. "So did I; but Jeanne has arranged differently. She told me this evening that we go back to town on Thursday. Doesn't it sound soon?"

Strode said nothing. He was looking across the lawn towards the cliff.

They heard Mrs. Maxtead laugh and Penrhyn open the piano; then very gently the notes of Chopin's "Funeral March" poured across the room.

Strode looked round at Anna. "But you'll come back? I'll see you again?"

Without looking at him she moved across the room. "Jeanne," she said sharply, "why do you play that? You know that I hate it."

Mrs. Maxtead stopped. "Doctor Penrhyn has never buried anybody to it; I was just showing him how it went." She began a bar or two of Greig's "Wedding March."

Anna coloured and walked to the piano. "You are incorrigible!" She laid her hand on the other's fingers. "Doctor Penrhyn, don't you think it's horrid of her to play of serious things like marrying and dying, when we were all so gay?"

Penrhyn looked across the room. "That depends," he said dryly. "Our host might be contemplating either one or the other — judging by looks."

"Maurice!" called Mrs. Maxtead, "your name is being taken in vain; come and defend it." She began to play a minuet.

Strode moved his shoulders and laughed, then slowly crossed the room. At the same moment a servant entered with coffee, and as the man passed him he took two cups from the tray and moved towards Anna.

"Will you be out to-morrow morning?" He held out one cup.

"I think so."

"Before breakfast?"

"Quite possibly." She took the cup.

"Then let me take you for a row? The sea will be as smooth as glass; I'll have the boat under the Cottage at eight. Just say you'll come?" His voice was very low, but his eagerness was apparent in every word.

An paused, then slightly, almost imperceptibly, bent her head in assent.

"Thank you," he said below his breath; then he turned to the piano.

"Have we leave to smoke?"

Mrs. Maxtead looked up at him with her shrewd eyes, then she looked down at the keyboard; then, without any obvious reason, she laughed softly to herself.

PART TWO—CHAPTER VII

THE waters of the creek shone green in the morning light. Strode in a flannel suit, with a pipe between his lips, leant over the side of his boat and looked down into the depths; shorewards, the cliff cast emerald shadows; seaward, the sun made a network of gold; by his side a shelf of flat rocks with many jagged points, many smoothed spaces and glimmering pools, ran out into the sea.

It was a morning of shining stillness; the scrape of the moored boat came methodically, as each faint swell caused her to brush the rocks; on the grey shingle the imperceptible waves broke with a tiny crash; and high above his head, from the barley fields beyond the cliff, came the rise and drop of a lark's song.

Anna, threading her way down the steep path, halted in silent admiration; the clearness of the morning, the sharp-cut newness of the day broke on her with sudden meaning; she stopped and drew in her breath. From her position on the cliff, Strode's boat, lying under the shadow of the rocks, was invisible. For a moment she wondered if it was desecration to intrude on such a scene, then, smil-

ing at the thought, she went on again. The joy and strength of life were in the air; the sand of the path rose about her feet in little clouds; the light-tinted poppies — mauve and straw-colour and pink — swept her skirts as she passed; with every step her speed increased, till, turning a curve in the track, the moored boat met her gaze and she stood still again, smiling and flushed.

With the swiftness of her pause a handful of pebbles were unloosed and fell to the rocks in a little shower. Strode looked up.

"One moment!" he called, as he raised his hat. "Stay where you are." He threw his pipe into the bow and sprang ashore. Anna, on the path above, watched the swinging ease with which he crossed the rocks, and involuntarily the smile deepened round her mouth. The sun was on his face as he neared her, and in the critical light of the morning his tanned skin looked as clear as a boy's, his grey eyes almost as frank.

"The nicest thing about you is your reliableness," he said. "You keep a promise as if you were a man. Is n't it a glorious day?" He held out his hand.

She took it, and the strength of the fingers and coolness of his skin struck her; she looked down at the hand and smiled.

"You 've been in the sea."

"Yes, at six o'clock."

They began to descend the cliff.

"Had you a good swim?"

"Fine! I pulled round to my special diving-

stone and had a glorious plunge. Look out. That's a bad bit. But I've been home since then and have brushed my hair, I would n't have dared meet you otherwise." He laughed and took off his hat.

She looked at his well-smoothed hair. "That was very considerate of you." She smiled.

He looked at her seriously. "Do you find me considerate?"

"Why?"

"No special reason. I'd like to seem a decent sort of chap — to you."

They were silent till the boat was reached. Anna stepped in with due regard to balance; then, before taking her place in the stern, she lifted a cushion and held it up. "Here is your witness," she said.

They both laughed, and Strode, setting the boat adrift, jumped in; a second later, the boat swung slowly outward from the rocks. A dozen rapid strokes sent them well into the open; the cliff receded, becoming a dark mass against the sky; the sea spread before them a lawn of enchanted green. Anna leant back, the ropes of the rudder held idly in her hands; to her ears, the click of the oars in the rowlocks was like soothing music; the joy of motion ran tingling through her. It was a full minute before she stirred or spoke; even then it was lazily, as one makes a forced concession.

"I want you to talk," she spoke without looking up.

Strode leant forward, resting on the oars. "Can I choose the subject?"

She looked up swiftly, then immediately her glance fell. "No," she said, "I 'll choose that. Let me see. Tell me about Canada again."

For a second he sat very still, then he jerked his hands and a shower of water beads scattered from the blades of the oars. "I almost expected that," he said.

"Why?"

"Why?" He pulled three strokes. "Because the last fortnight every time I 've tried to say anything that I wanted to say, I 've been shoved back on Canada. I 'm about sick of Canada — " He lifted the oars again.

Anna looked down at the ropes, to hide the smile behind her eyes. "That 's very hard on you," she said.

"Somewhat." He looked at her directly. "On Friday I talked about ice-sailing till my throat parched; on Saturday you questioned me for an hour on the relative hardness of hickory and ironwood; on Sunday" — he stopped impressively — "on Sunday my tea got cold while I described the exact heat at which copper can be extracted from its ores, and after that Mrs. Maxtead refused me another cup until I 'd made a diagram of the first reverberatory melting-furnace my uncle ever used. Do you wonder that I 've struck?"

Anna raised her head. "Poor you!" she said. "And you were so nice and courteous and interesting all the time."

Strode laughed. "And now you see the beast

without his skin. Just admit that there are other things in life beside mining and smelting and exporting?" He leant across the oars.

Anna blushed suddenly. "Look!" she said. "We 're drifting out to sea."

"I want an answer to my question."

"And I want to skirt the head, close in by the land."

The boat spun round; in twenty strokes they were in shelter of the cliff, skimming slowly past the rocks.

"Now you 've got your way, let me have mine? Just admit that there are other things?"

Anna was silent; she leant out and caught a strand of seaweed dangling from a rock.

"Are n't there other things?"

"I suppose there are. Is n't this a lovely brown?" She held the seaweed to the light.

Strode deliberately shipped the oars and let the boat drift; then he leant forward and took the seaweed from her hand.

Their eyes met.

"When the crew mutinies," she said, "it 's time for the passenger to jump ashore." She laughed a little nervously, but there was an excited brightness in her eyes.

Without changing his position, Strode threw the seaweed overboard. "The passenger would only wet her pretty frock," he said; "she would n't alter the inevitable by a pin's point." He looked at her steadily.

Anna's fingers tightened again round the ropes. She looked out across the sea — over the spaces of glassy green to the white horizon line.

Strode bent very near. With one hand he warded the boat from the rocks, with the other he touched her arm.

"There are times when a man seems a fool," he said; "the more he feels, the greater fool he seems. I want you not to laugh."

Anna remained silent, but a mist — either of sun or tears — crossed her eyes and shut away the sea.

His fingers moved down and touched her hand. "I've cared for you since that first night in town. Say, do I seem at all worth caring for?"

There was no sound. So great was the quiet that fifty yards above them they could hear a goat moving amongst the bracken on the cliff.

"Anna?"

A puffin sailed round the stern of the boat, looked up inquisitively at the silent figures, then dived under the keel.

"Anna?"

At last Anna turned; there was a light in her eyes and her smile was very sweet. When she spoke there was an echo of the old childish candour running through her voice.

"I think you are more worth caring for than anybody in the world," she said simply; and her warm fingers closed round his.

PART TWO—CHAPTER VIII

MRS. MAXTEAD shook out the sheets of her newspaper and skimmed the paragraphs with a preoccupied glance; it was the "Morning Post" of the day before, and stale news lacks piquancy. After a five minutes' perusal she laid the paper down, and her fingers strayed to the day's correspondence. There were nine letters for her and fourteen for Anna — fourteen envelopes, mostly foreign and all much re-addressed. She sorted them quickly, and leaning across the table made a little heap beside the girl's plate; then she picked up a knife and opened her own letters one by one.

The small round table had been drawn into the sun; bunches of mignonette rose cool and odorous from green bowls; the chintz-covered furniture and muslin curtains shone in the light; and through the open French window the warm salt fragrance of the sea drifted in across the lawn. The promise of the day, that two hours before had lain coolly on the waters, was already merging into hot fulfilment. In Cornwall, summer sits luxuriously in the flower fields, while in less favoured spots spring is still trailing her skirts.

Mrs. Maxtead began one letter, passed on to a second, picked up a third; then the door opened and the little Cornish maid entered, carrying a dish.

Her mistress looked up. "Don't uncover the fish, Dolly, I'll wait for five minutes more." Her eyes returned to her letter, and the maid withdrew. She read on to the third page, then again she raised her eyes; there was a fresh interruption. A fresh sound was borne across the lawn; the pleasantest sound the world holds — the sound of young voices in the early air. She listened for a second, then she did a considerate thing. Leaning across the table, she reversed the top envelope of Anna's pile. When the voices and laughter grew nearer, then altogether ceased and two shadows fell across the sun, she was looking up calmly with lifted brows.

"Maurice!" she said in affected surprise. "Anna I have seen before — from my bedroom window; but Maurice —" She looked with quizzical amusement from one radiant face to the other.

Strode moved forward. "I just rowed over and moored in the creek —"

"And Anna selected the rocks for a morning walk? What a delightful coincidence!"

Anna stepped into the room; her arms were full of poppies, straw-coloured and pink, her light dress was strewn with their petals; her skin, darkened by three weeks' sun, seemed to glow with colour and life. "Feel these — are n't they like silk?"

Mrs. Maxtead dusted the pollen from her cheek

and laughed. "Do you think I need drugging?" She looked across at Strode.

He returned her glance humorously. "D' you know," he said, "I've sometimes speculated on that very score."

Her eyes sparkled. "Speculation, my dear Maurice, is another form of laziness. Come in and ring the bell. Of course you'll stay to breakfast, now that you are here?"

"I wish I could." His eyes sought Anna's, but hers were on the flowers.

"What prevents?"

"Well, you see —" He passed his hand over his hair. "Penrhyn stayed with me last night; I suppose he'll want some food. It's a great bore, of course —"

Mrs. Maxtead poured some cream into her cup. "How inconsiderate of Penrhyn!" She raised her eyes. "Though somehow I look upon him leniently; I've been starving, myself, for half an hour."

Anna dropped her flowers. "Oh, Jeanne, how abominable of me! Let me make up!" She lifted the cover of the silver dish.

Strode stepped from the window and took up a plate.

"You should have seen the sea this morning, Jeanne." Anna helped the fish quickly. "It was pure glass — like a magic mirror."

"The mirror of Shalot." Strode balanced the hot plate. "It reflected all the things in life."

Anna coloured and hastily covered the dish. "It

was so still under the headland that we could hear a goat cropping the grass, ever so high above."

"Fact, Mrs. Maxtead." Strode carried round the plate and set it down.

Mrs. Maxtead looked out across the lawn. "Poor Doctor Penrhyn!" she murmured below her breath.

Strode looked at his watch. "Yes; I expect one has obligations." He looked regretfully round. "What a jolly room this is! Got a sort of curved effect —" He stopped.

Mrs. Maxtead looked back into the room. "When I stay with you, Maurice, you 'll arrange that we breakfast independently, won't you? It would be such a saving of time."

Strode laughed. "If Penrhyn has missed a meal, he 's gained a champion. Good-bye." He held out his hand.

"Since when have we become ceremonious?" she said, ignoring the hand.

He turned to Anna. "Will you?"

She extended her hand laughingly. "It 's right to pity the rejected, is n't it?"

Their fingers touched, and Strode's eyes fell on her plate.

"What a lot of letters!"

Involuntarily her free hand touched the top envelope. "What a lot of responsibilities!" There was a nervous note in her voice; she raised her eyes and met his straight glance. "We all have our responsibilities. You have Doctor Penrhyn —" She laughed again.

The faint shadow of question left his face as quickly as it had come. He pressed her hand. "You should have none; you were made to shift your burdens on to someone else."

"Maurice!"

"Not another word, Mrs. Maxtead; I'm off!" He crossed the room; but at the French window he turned back.

"Say, Mrs. Maxtead?"

She looked up.

"Penrhyn will be with me till evening; we'll be boring each other to death by afternoon —"

She raised her cup. "Doctor Penrhyn struck me as being rather interesting," she remarked dryly.

Strode stepped back into the room. "Then ask us along to tea —?"

There was a long pause; then Mrs. Maxtead looked up with a whimsical expression. "Transparent as you are, Maurice, you shut out the sun."

Strode backed on to the lawn. "But the tea?"

"Oh, if you want to come very badly, turn up at five."

"You're the rudest person created; but we'll come at five." He looked towards Anna, but she had picked up her flowers again; with a laugh, he turned towards the sea, and they heard him whistle as he crossed the lawn.

After he had gone there was a momentous pause. Anna arranged the poppies with undue attention to their shades; she felt her companion's eyes, like

humorously keen and searching lights; she felt the blood mount to her cheeks and her consciousness tingle into her hands till her fingers stumbled; then at last, with a collapse of all resolve, she threw the flowers in a heap on the table and looked up.

"Well?" she said.

Mrs. Maxtead's eyes wandered over her face. "Is n't it I who should say that?" She poured out a cup of coffee and passed it across the table.

Anna sat down, drank a little, then fingered her letters with unusual haste.

A smile passed over Mrs. Maxtead's face. "The letters ran it rather close this morning," she said; "too close to be repeated. I 'd tell him to-day, if I were you."

Anna suddenly pushed her cup away and rose; there was colour and excitement in her face; for a moment it seemed that the emotions that underran her nature would flood and overflow, but she checked the outbreak; her face was calm again, and she walked round the table.

"I meant to tell him, Jeanne. Yesterday, when you spoke about it, I made up my mind; and last night, when he asked me to come on the water this morning, I agreed, because it seemed so excellent a chance — so excellent an opportunity." She paused.

"I understand. That was last night."

"No; you 're wrong. When I woke, the intention was stronger than before. I rehearsed how I 'd put the thing, all the way down the cliff."

"And got stage fright at the last moment."

Anna smiled. "Well, at first there was the sun and the sea and the quickness of the boat, and I could n't break in on them straight away; afterwards, under the cliff — " She stopped again.

The other looked up keenly and quizzically. "What happened under the cliff?"

For a second the girl moved irresolutely; then with a little rustle she dropped to her knees beside her companion's chair, and looked up into her face.

"Under the cliff, Jeanne, it was impossible."

Mrs. Maxtead bent — an unusual impulse with her. "And why, Anna?"

Anna returned her gaze; for a second the singleness of her soul showed like starlight in her eyes, then her lashes fell. "Because he cares for me, Jeanne, and I care for him — and there was no room for anything beside."

An odd expression crossed the other's face — an expression fleeting as air, that was yet a shadow, a faint reflection of a thought. She bent lower and her lips parted, then suddenly she shrugged her shoulders and sat upright. A second later she laughed, her old casual laugh.

"My dear Anna, you have a wonderful power. Another minute and I believe I should have cried. Get up and ring for a new breakfast! As for Maurice Strode — I made up my mind ten months ago that you and he should marry; it took me four years to find a genius, it has taken me eleven to

find an honest man." She shook out her skirts and rose.

Anna stood up as well; but she still held the other's hand, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Jeanne —"

Mrs. Maxtead freed her hand and held it up. "Don't!" she said. "Blame is bracing, but praise —" She never finished; with a sudden hasty movement she walked to the window and out across the lawn.

PART TWO—CHAPTER IX

MRS. MAXTEAD lay back in her long deck-chair and held up her hand. "What a day it has been! Even the dew is forgetting to fall!"

Penrhyn, from his camp stool, looked critically towards the copper-tinted sky. "Storm to-morrow!" he said laconically, as he laid his empty cup on the grass.

"What a prophet of evil!" She smiled.

"Never mind Penrhyn, Mrs. Maxtead, he has a prophetic instinct for sulphurous smells." Strode, lying on the lawn, shifted his hat from his face and laughed.

Anna lifted her head and unconsciously echoed the laugh. She was standing by the tea-table, throwing crumbs to the thrushes, as they hopped in and out amongst the flower-beds. Her tall figure, in its soft pink dress, was outlined against the whiteness of the house; her face looked very radiant and very young. "What a lazy afternoon!" she said. "We were silent for five minutes till Jeanne spoke; I counted, as I fed the birds."

"What a shameful waste of time!" Strode rose, shaking some newly mown hay from his clothes. "It's six o'clock; I propose a walk."

"A what, Maurice?" Mrs. Maxtead sat up and swept her parasol through a cloud of gnats.

"My dear Strode" — Penrhyn took off his panama and fanned himself — "there is no more ill-considered act."

"Rot!" said Strode sharply. "There's no more sensible thing than a walk round the cliff before dinner. Just round to your nook, Mrs. Maxtead, and back again?"

Anna moved round the table. "Do, Jeanne. The cliff is so lovely and ghostly in the dusk."

Mrs. Maxtead shut her parasol. "I detest psychical research. Beside, I have n't got my hat."

"I 'll fetch the hat, Mrs. Maxtead."

"My dear Maurice, you would be sure to bring an unbecoming one. If you want a walk, why not take Anna? Doctor Penrhyn and I have outgrown the fascination of getting lost in the dark. Let us stay where we are; there's a new embalming process that I want badly to discuss." Her eyes gleamed ironically.

Strode laughed. "We are taught not to be importunate," he said. "Of course, if you prefer mummies to —"

"Moonshine. Quite right, Maurice!" Her voice was keen and amused. "Take care of Anna, and have her back by eight."

Strode turned to Anna. "The powers are decisive," he said; "what are we to do?" His tone was light, but his eyes pleaded.

She looked at him for an instant; then her glance met Mrs. Maxtead's, and she smiled. "Bow to the inevitable, I suppose."

Strode smiled his gratitude and a moment later the two crossed the lawn. They walked quickly, as only the very young and the very happy walk; their forms were silhouetted straight and clear against the orange sky; and as they turned to the right, and the white gate swung to behind them, Strode's careless laugh floated back across the quiet. Mrs. Maxtead sighed, then moved restlessly.

"Doctor Penrhyn," she said, "there is one gulf you scientists will never bridge; one thing you will never give us back."

Penrhyn leant forward. "And that?" he asked.

"Is our youth." She closed her eyes.

The track round the headland had darkened to purple against the green of the bracken; above the waters the coming dusk had gathered in a cloud; against a metallic sky a band of rooks drew slowly homeward with a flap of heavy wings and an occasional raw cry; in the distance, a cow lowed with gentle persistence. The whole of nature seemed drowsy with coming sleep.

Anna looked up at Strode. "Do you ever feel," she said, "that there are times when one is too happy — when everything is so still that one waits for and dreads a break?"

For answer, he bent and kissed her. "Dearest,"

he said quietly, "when two people suddenly find their hands full of happiness, they don't look away for suppositions; they want their thoughts for something nearer home."

They walked on again, and involuntarily she closed her eyes; there was deep safety and protection in the clasp of his fingers about her hand. She put her next question in a reluctant voice.

"Maurice, have you ever had anything on your mind?"

He looked at her humorously. "Of course." He laughed. "Debts and duty and heaps of things. But why?"

"Because"—she moved her fingers restlessly in his, then looked quickly up—"because I have something on mine—something I want to say."

"Something serious?" He gazed directly out across the sea.

"Something quite serious."

"Then I won't hear it." He looked round. "There is only one serious thing that I'll listen to to-night, and that I've already heard." He lifted her hand and held it against his lips. His manner was quiet, but there was a reliant intonation in his voice.

She looked up again with swift appreciation. "Maurice, I've always said you would be good at understanding. Was I right?"

He thought for a moment without replying; then he glanced down at her with an amused smile. "I

expect that depends," he said. "I have been called obstinate and prejudiced and a lot of other unpleasant things; but I think I could be very lenient to you."

"This thing of mine —" Her fingers moved uneasily again. "It's so little and yet so big; I want to say it and I can't say it. What must I do?" She laughed.

Walking quickly, they had turned the first bend of the cliff, and the full majesty of the sea spread before them; above, crowning the headland, stood three trees, whipped into fantastic shapes by recurrent gales; and below, sharp against the water, rose the pointed rock that marked Mrs. Maxtead's nook. Anna looked towards the horizon, then back to the path stretching in a dark ribbon from their feet.

"What am I to do?" she said again.

For a full minute Strode was silent, then quite abruptly he stood still.

"I told you that I've been called obstinate," he said, "but no one has ever called me inquisitive. I care for you beyond anything in the world, which means I believe in you beyond anything in the world. I don't want to hear your secret, but if it worries you, have it out. Have it out, and let's forget it! I give you to the nook to screw up your courage." He laughed again, and in the fading daylight his eyes looked very clear.

Anna drew a great sigh of satisfaction. "You

are as sensible as Jeanne," she said, "and as good as a light. I so often feel stupid in the dusk."

They walked on, in silence and close together, till the rocks were reached. There Anna drew away.

"Look," she cried, "there 's a star at the horizon — and another — and another — " Her eyes swept the sky. "Oh, Maurice, how good the world is! All my silly dread is gone." Her voice was clear and reassured again. She stepped back to him and touched his hand.

"And the secret?" He laughed.

"Oh, you shall hear it when we are sitting comfortably in the rocks — where you cannot see my face."

"Is it as terrible as that?"

"Oh, it is momentous." She laughed. "You go first; I get on best without any help." A sudden weight seemed lifted from her; she threw back her head and breathed in the salt warm air. Then she stooped and picked a handful of dog-roses that gleamed white in the partial gloom.

"Maurice!"

"Dearest?" Strode looked up from the second ledge of rock.

"Are these roses pink or white?" She leant down and held the flowers at arm's length.

He caught her fingers. "Pink of course — next to your hand."

They both laughed.

"Is it safe to jump?" She leant farther out.

There was a delicious sense of danger in the dusk of the sharp descent.

Strode held up his arms. "Quite safe — like this!"

He held her for a moment closely; then they both stood flushed and laughing on the little rock-bound plateau.

Anna felt her hat, then began to twist the rose-stalks into a bunch.

"May I have one?"

She raised her eyes. "Can I spare one?"

"You have too many good things already."

She smiled, and slowly detached two buds. "Have you a pin?"

He searched the lapel of his coat. "No; won't it do without?"

"Of course not. You 'd lose one bud, and the other would feel so small, all alone in the world. Perhaps this will do?" She put her hand to her belt and drew out a pearl-headed pin. "Now stand quite still."

He obeyed and the roses were arranged. She took a step back and surveyed the effect. "That 's quite nice, but you must give me something in exchange for the pin; pins are unlucky, you know."

"So they are. Just a second!" He searched one pocket, then another; then he looked up with whimsical distress. "By Jove!" he said, "Penryhn has cleaned me out at piquet. There is n't a sixpence left."

Involuntarily she laughed. "A penny, then."

"I scattered my coppers among the urchins, as we came to tea. What are we to do?"

She laughed again. "Give me back my pin."

He looked up. "Your first present? Not quite." He recommenced his search; then suddenly his face cleared. "By Jove!" he said again; and with a jerk he pulled out his watch.

Anna came nearer.

"This is a coin with a history — or rather, the coin of a man with a history." His fingers were busy on a little ring. "I would n't part with it to anyone but you — I would n't really; I must tell you its story some day, when you 've got time to listen." With a twist the ring opened and he held out the coin — a copper coin that showed dully in the twilight.

Anna took it and held it up. "This is valuable," she said interestedly. "It belongs to the Greek Imperial coinage." She scanned the rude religious rite that the coin portrayed.

He looked at her with sudden admiration. "One is always finding new things in you. I did n't know you cared for coins — and things like that."

She blushed. "I understand them a little — coins and manuscript." She drew away from him, and settled herself hastily in Mrs. Maxtead's favourite seat, making a place for Strode at her feet.

He dropped into the appointed place and sat silent for a while; then he looked up. "Now what about the wonderful secret?" He took off his hat and laid it on the grass.

She stooped forward and touched his hair. "When we get back," she said softly.

"Come, you 're shirking the compact."

"Maurice — "

"No excuses." He smiled and felt for her hand.

She looked at the rocks, then at the sea; then she closed her eyes in dreamy pleasure.

"Maurice, let 's make a bargain?"

He looked up at her. "A deal?" He raised his eyebrows.

She opened her eyes lazily and smiled. Something of the coming warmth and darkness of the night were shadowed in her face. "Yes. Tell me *your* story now, and I 'll tell mine afterwards. It is the very hour for a romance."

Strode raised himself. "But, my dear child, 't would take an hour."

"I 'd like it to take two. Be nice, Maurice, and give me my way."

"You won't like it; it 's a sad story."

She leant forward gently and laid her hand in his.

"When one is very happy, Maurice, one likes to hear of other people's sadness; it makes one appreciate."

Strode sank back.

"You 're a regular tyrant," he said; "but I suppose the atmosphere is in league with you; no one would have the physical energy to resist anything to-night. May I light my pipe?"

PART TWO — CHAPTER X

THERE was an interval of silence while Strode pulled at his pipe. To Anna, waiting in lazy contentment, the faint curl of smoke and the dull glow of the smouldering tobacco — a red disc against the partial gloom — gave a sense of peace; they seemed to presage many such scenes, many such hours, and with a wide sense of thankfulness she let her eyes close again.

"I'll begin in the orthodox way. It was five years ago — "

Anna smiled and nestled back against the rock. "How perfect! I sha'n't even interrupt with 'yes' or 'no.'"

"It was five years ago — on my second visit home; when I was twenty-three."

"It is n't a love story, Maurice?"

"Not of my making. But I thought you were n't going to interrupt."

She laughed happily. "Go on."

He smoked silently for a moment; then looked up. "By the way, Anna, you won't laugh if I get serious at the end? I 'm not a sentimental chap, but the tale caught me in a solemn mood. It worked

on me at the time; it's made sort of echoes ever since. Promise you won't laugh?"

She put out her hand and touched his hair. "What do you think?"

"Well, then, it began in an uncommon way." He settled himself more comfortably. "It was my first day in London; I possessed no club then, and the few people I knew were out of town. I was in the dull position of an absolutely aimless being, when, strolling down the Strand, I ran against a man I knew." He took his pipe from between his teeth. "He was a man I had met on shipboard — Lorrison by name; a man who always sat wrapped in a shawl, with a cap pulled over his eyes, and a pile of books at his feet. He was not the precise companion I'd have chosen, but I believe I'd have shaken hands with the devil himself on that particular day. I asked him what he had in view, and he told me he was bound for some benighted shop in some benighted slum, on a hunt for Merovingian manuscript. 'T was rather Greek to me; but I said that if he did n't mind, I'd hail a hansom and come along. He had no objection. I hailed the cab and we got inside. It was a dreary morning and the drive was n't stimulating, all smell and slum and fog. I'll leave the details out. It's enough to say that we arrived, left the hansom in a thoroughfare, and walked down a narrow street — Hang this pipe! It's actually gone out At the left-hand side of the street was a shop. Ah, that's better." He struck

a match, re-lit the pipe, and drew in a long breath of smoke.

"The shop was very low-ceiled, very musty — quite romantically musty — and on that particular morning very dark. As we entered, I remember, all the light there was seemed concentrated in a glass partition that shut off a little desk. Sitting at the desk in a huddled-up sort of way, was the oddest figure — Hallo! What's that?"

"Only the coin. The coin slipped." Anna bent and thrust her fingers shakingly between the crevices of the rocks.

"One minute! I'll strike a light!" He struck a fresh match, and the girl put up her hand.

"The glare hurts your eyes?"

"A little. Please go on."

"Well, inside the glass partition, as I tell you, was the oddest figure I had ever seen. It looked the very picture of desolation, the extremes of loneliness and isolation wrapped in one. It seemed to stare out of the gloom like a fact that's suddenly forced home. It's five years ago, but I'll never forget it; I remember it as plain as I remember yesterday." He waved the match to and fro as he searched. "The man was deformed, but somehow it was n't his deformity — it was his attitude, his expression, the air he breathed. I tell you, commonplace beggar that I am, I felt his tragedy before I'd been five minutes in the place. Hallo, there's the coin! Between that anemone

tuft and your dress." Anna moved stiffly, and he picked it up.

"Won't you take it?" He held it out.

She half stretched out her hand; then, with an unconquerable repugnance, drew it back again. "Keep it for the present; it might slip again." She spoke slowly, but her voice was in excellent control.

Strode dropped the coin into his pocket. "Well, to go on. Lorrison nodded to the man, and asked after his master; but the fellow, instead of answering, began to talk of books. I put him down as morbidly reticent — then and there. For half an hour he and Lorrison talked, while I leant against the counter and just watched. Now inaction is very unpleasant to me; but I found that watching the most engrossing thing I 'd ever done. The man gripped me — literally gripped me."

He stopped to rest, and Anna leant back against the rock. For the moment she was entirely numb. What she had felt in any past hour was chaos; what she might feel in any hour to come was blank. She passed her hand slowly along the coldness of the rock, and it seemed that her blood was of the same temperature. But it is an odd truth that one seldom meets the astounding facts of life with any great display. When Strode's voice broke in again, her nerves scarcely experienced a jar.

"When we left the shop," he said, "I questioned

Lorrison, but his answers were unsatisfying. During the drive west he talked of nothing but a treasure he had secured, and we parted at his hotel. The next day I left town and came down here." He stopped; waited for a while in silence; then took up his story again.

"It was two months before I saw either the man or the shop again. Then shipping business connected with my uncle's mines brought me back to London and down to the docks. The docks reminded me of Lorrison and his curio shop. I told you it lay away down southeast, did n't I? Well, on my way home I strolled through the narrow street and dropped in on the rum man. I talked to him for half an hour, but I left with nothing beyond a feeling of interest — and the coin I 've given you to-night. He stayed an enigma: very gentle, very courteous, but as secretive as the Sphinx." Strode stopped again, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Well, business brought me to the docks again, and interest brought me to the curio shop. I made up my mind to know that man against his will: I made it a point of honour to myself. I won't tell you how many times I tried and how many I failed. I 'll go right on to the night things fell out straight. Chance delayed me in a man's office until six. In October the dusk has begun to fall at six, and 't was dark as I walked up Felt Street — the street where the shop stands. The shutters had been put up and the place closed for

the night, and precisely as I passed the door it opened and my odd friend came out. I spoke to him, and he shied away from me like a frightened horse; then he saw my face by a gas-lamp and a look of recognition crossed his eyes — a look that was almost a craving for sympathy, it seemed to me. Without his leave I joined him, and we walked down the street side by side. He led me by a hundred little by-ways and cross-streets down to the wharves — his usual walking-place. And there, in the midst of a network of bales and barrels, with the ships looming huge in the partial dark, the mesh of masts and rigging cut against the sky, we walked for two hours. The filth of the town came to us mixed with the tar of the sea; the fires of the late workmen flared up at intervals of smoky gloom. The scene was weird, but in the whole odd medley my companion was the weirdest object of all, — his pale face sometimes in shadow, sometimes lit up; his deformed body sharp and plain at one moment, vague and indistinct the next. It was a queer experience: if I was interested before, I was twenty times more interested then. I set myself to draw him out with all the persistence I possessed. I walked with him up and down. I worked on him, hung back, urged him on." Strode paused. His tobacco-pouch was held between his hands. "I had made up my mind to get at the man's story, Anna, and I won!" In his voice there was the alert tone, the assurance that characterised his whole being. He leant back and

looked up into the girl's face. But the night had fallen between them like a veil. His glance failed to reach her, though his tone did not.

A shudder ran through her to her feet and fingertips. She closed her eyes, as one closes them before a precipice; her brain swung round as it might on a giddy height. She had never fainted in her life, but she found herself wondering, in an impersonal way, what the sensation might be like.

"And I won, Anna! I won!"

Her lips formed some word, she was uncertain what. Only an inarticulate sound escaped them. Then she bent forward in sudden fear that he had noticed, and touched his hand.

He caught her fingers. "Sweetheart, what a perfect listener you make!" She withdrew her hand softly, and he meditatively refilled his pipe. He had the air of a man who has settled down to the telling of a yarn. Visions of night excursions in the Canadian forests, of lying round a fire in the vast solitude while men talked or listened in the easy freedom that the dark engenders, floated round him in lazy peace. "You are as good a comrade as a man," he said at length. Then he struck a match.

Anna's faculties were numbed, but her fear was still astir. The throbbing of her heart frightened her by its irregularity; the tingling sensation crept from her fingers to her wrists. At last panic seized her and she sat up. "Maurice," she said, "I am so curious. Please go on — straight on to the point."

Strode pulled gently at his newly-lit pipe. "Of course," he said, "it 's the story of a woman."

"Why 'of course'?"

"Because woman is the big jump over which so many of us get smashed up." He laughed. "No, dearest! Seriously, it was the blankest case of callousness on a woman's part, the hardest breaking-up of a decent life that I 've met with. I sha'n't tell the tale as the poor beggar told it me. There were too many halts and stops. I 'll tell it straight, clean through, as you 'll understand it best.

"It seems that his coming to this shop in the first instance savoured of romance. He made a wild story of a winter night, a robbery, and a pursuing crowd, from which he was saved by the daughter of the house — a girl of sixteen. The rescue itself possessed unusual elements. The picture was so sharply impressed on the poor chap's brain that it even roused me to some enthusiasm at the time. But the enthusiasm evaporated very soon. A woman who shows up fine in a dramatic moment and can be meanly selfish on second thoughts is hardly rare. You know the type?"

There was a pause.

"Yes, I know the type," Anna answered dully. Her eyes were on the red circle of the pipe.

"Well, they took him in — the girl and her father, an eccentric old Russian Jew — and for a bit things went all right. Then the inevitable came. The life was lonely. The rescued man was keenly

susceptible. The girl had uncommon charm. The inevitable came. He fell desperately, lastingly in love."

Anna put up her hand and touched her forehead; little tendrils of hair clung damply to it; her skin was rigidly cold. "Go on," she said again.

"The whole thing was pitiful — pitiful to the last degree. The way he talked of that girl, worshipped her, sort of built a halo round her, was heart-rending. I never saw such blind devotion to a human being. 'She was like the sun!' He repeated that over and over again. 'She was like the sun!' She could do nothing that was wrong."

"Well?" Anna moistened her lips.

"Well, the end was the common one; you 've guessed it of course. The girl got a glimpse of life, and, after the way of her kind, it dazzled her. One morning when he came downstairs she was gone: he found an open door. Just for a minute he saw nothing else. It was, as he said himself, as if life had snapped in two; there was nothing anywhere but empty space. He rushed out into the street; then he stopped. Poor brute! I can see him stop. He remembered the father — the solitary old Russian who had lost home and health and wife in the Jewish persecutions, and who was living in a sort of patched-up after-peace among his books. I can see him stop, as the thought caught him; 't was his portion to break the news to the father."

Strode stopped, and Anna sat quite still.

"He stopped, as I tell you; then he turned and

walked back into the shop. The man admits to being a physical coward — yet he turned and walked back into the shop. I would n't have been in his place for a thousand pounds." He stopped again.

Anna clasped her hands. With the agonies of birth, the old life, the old obligations were goading themselves into being; her breath caught in her throat; the silent oppression of the night hung upon her, held her, pressed her down.

"Some men sort of live in a dream," Strode said. "This old Russian had been living in a dream. He escaped the persecutions with his reason — just grazed the narrow line that turns the brain. But on that morning — " His pipe had died low again; he paused to pull it to a glow. "On that morning — "

A wave of expectancy, sick and deadly, shook Anna; her fingers dropped nervelessly apart.

"On that morning the extra line was drawn. It seems that behind an indifferent exterior this one child was the light of his eyes. It took a long time to make him understand; when he did understand — "

"His brain gave way." With sweeping certainty the words left Anna's lips, but so low, so horror-stricken, that their intonation was almost lost.

"Exactly. The shock turned his brain. He 's quite harmless, I believe — quite like a child; but he 'll never see his shop again, and he has forgotten

how to read. He sits all day talking to his wife and child." Strode paused again, and the silence hung palpably on the air.

Anna did not move, but the tension of her throat never relaxed. The necessity of coolness passed and repassed through her mind with the method of a machine, and she clung to it with the desperate primary instinct of defence.

"Did the girl leave no message?" she asked at length.

"Oh yes, she did; to my mind that was her worst act. Two days after she had gone, when the poor beggar I've been telling you of was trying to patch things together with the common remedy of routine, he found a message scrawled on the shop slate. There you have the real woman of the type; afraid to strike a decent final blow, she threw a straw to a drowning man. That was eight years ago. Incredible as it sounds, that man is still clinging to the straw. I can see his face as he turned in the glow of the fire and told me so."

Anna stirred. "But the girl, Maurice — the girl? What could a child of sixteen know — or guess — or dream of such results — ? I think you are unjust."

He looked up, trying to see her face. "It is n't the girl of sixteen that I blame," he said, "but the girl of twenty — of twenty-one — of twenty-two. D' you mean to say that the facts of life die out of their own accord? that to a bright gifted woman

they would n't come back again and again, in a new guise, with a new force? Don't you think that the poor souls she had deserted would haunt her, unless of her own deliberate will she shut them out?" He laid down his pipe.

Anna's soul failed, but she made a last stand.

"You only know the man, Maurice," she said desperately. "You only think of the man; you are a man yourself. You know nothing of the girl; she may have gone under long ago; she may have died —"

"Ah, so I often thought; so I thought till one day three years ago, when, being in town, I strolled into the shop and found the poor beggar there curiously disturbed. He had obtained news of her after five years."

"News!"

"Yes — the oddest news. In passing by a window where photographs are sold he had stopped for a minute, attracted by the crowd; and there, in the place of prominence, was the picture of a very beautiful and distinguished woman. Of course you 've guessed. The woman was the girl; but she was something more than just beautiful — she was a celebrity. Who d' you think she was?" He turned again eagerly. "Anna, guess who she was?"

Anna's lips were so dry that they hardly moved. "How should I know, Maurice? How could I know?"

"Of course you could n't; but prepare for a big surprise. She was Solny the actress! The actress who made such a hit in Paris a couple of seasons back; the woman who 's coming to London this year, and who 's going to storm creation, according to the people who know. You 've seen her abroad, of course; I have not. But then I 've lived a step or two behind events; but even to me her name is as familiar as my own. Does n't it sound incredible? Just think of it! Does n't it sound incredible? This woman on the right side of the world, without a wish that she can't gratify; and down in the slummy southeast the old father dragging out the worst sort of existence; the man who cares for her working day after day in a musty little shop, and thinking that there 's nothing better in life than to pray to her as if she were a saint. Does n't it sound beyond belief?"

Anna put her fingers over her ears. "Stop, Maurice! It 's horrible." Her voice shuddered through the dusk.

"Yes. That 's about the word. I 've never seen the woman — never even seen her photograph, but the thought of her makes me sick. A sin of impulse one can forgive, but cool considered selfishness is a brand."

"Yes. A brand." Anna slowly reiterated the words, then she rose. Her head felt light; she rested her shoulder against the rock. For the moment a great thankfulness for the dark was her

prominent thought — a great enveloping relief that her face could not be seen.

At her first movement Strode turned round; his eyes narrowed as he tried to trace her features; then he smiled. "Have I tired you, dear?" The hardness dropped out of his voice; he put out his hand and touched her dress. "I have tired you, and you are cold. What a brute I've been!" He rose as well and took her hand. "Kiss me, and we'll forget it all. Here's your little coin." He felt in his pocket, then held out his hand.

For a minute Anna peered through the gloom; then the wave of repulsion swept over her again, and she pushed his hand aside. "No," she said suddenly, "it's ill-omened, ill-fated, Maurice. Take it away!"

Very quietly he slipped the coin back. "Forgive me, dear, for telling such a tale in such a place." With great gentleness he moved forward and took her in his arms. "Poor little girl!" he said. "Poor little girl! What inconsiderate beasts men are!"

Overhead the warm darkness had massed to clouds; their faces were pale outlines to each other's eyes. For a space Anna remained motionless, her shoulder resting against his arm, her head thrown back; then suddenly she stirred and clung to him.

"Maurice," she said, "tell me exactly what I seem to you — exactly. We've been wandering in such a wilderness: I want to feel love again."

Strode held her to him for an instant. "You

seem the best and the loveliest woman God ever made," he said. "The very loveliest — and the very best."

She closed her eyes. "Ah," she said lingeringly, "that was very sweet. Now let us go home."

PART TWO — CHAPTER XI

THE hall of the Cottage was dimly lighted when they returned. The shadow of a smile wavered across Anna's lips as she realised the circumstance. Fate is never without its oddly ironic compensations. At the door of the drawing-room she held out her hand.

"I 'll say good-bye here, Maurice. Doctor Penrhyn's storm is in the air. I must bathe my head before dinner; it aches badly."

"Poor little girl!" Strode raised her face and looked into it. "I don't quite believe all that; it 's my wretched story that 's got clean on your nerves."

She tried to smile. "We 'll call it nerves; nerves is such a useful word. But don't worry, I 'll be all right once the storm breaks. Say good-night for me to Doctor Penrhyn."

"It 's hard to let you go."

"It 's harder to go." Her voice sounded tired.

He passed his fingers over her hair. "I feel a brute to keep you here, yet I can't say go. When shall I see you to-morrow?"

"Oh, any time; after breakfast — any time. Good-night!" She touched his hand remindingly.

"You 'll be glad to see me?"

"Yes." She drew away from him suddenly and walked down the corridor. At the door of her bedroom she paused and looked back. He had moved a step or two in her direction, and was standing directly under the hanging lamp; the light, falling on his smooth hair, turned it fair. She drew a quick breath, then turned and ran back to him.

"Maurice!" she said. "Maurice!"

He caught her in his arms and held her closely. "Dearest! What is it, little one?"

She clung to him silently. The stillness of the night and its oppression seemed to brood over the house. Her hands clasped his shoulders, her heart beat unsteadily. "Maurice, I care for you more than you guess or dream — I love you very much." The pressure of her fingers tightened; then with a little shiver she drew away and looked nervously round. A blue flash glimmered and brushed her eyes; almost simultaneously the first peal of thunder rolled across the sky.

She laughed unsteadily, and Strode drew her close to him again.

"Afraid?"

"Not afraid; but it jars one through and through. Can't you feel it jar? It seems to have such scope — out here by the sea. Maurice, say that you care for me — just once more."

Another faint flash crossed the hall; as Strode bent to reply, a second peal, more sombre than the first, broke above their heads.

For an instant their lips held each other, then Anna pushed him away. "You must get home," she said quickly; "you must get home before the rain breaks. Good-night! Think always — always, Maurice, that I love you a million times more than myself. If I seem strange to-night it 's the electricity in the air. Good-night!" Her voice broke off short; she freed herself, and ran down the corridor.

Strode moved forward. "Anna!" he called softly. But the only answer that came to him was the sharp closing of a door, and the turning of a key in a lock. He waited for a minute uncertainly, then with a movement of puzzled disappointment he turned and walked back to the drawing-room door.

The dinner-gong had sounded through the house. Mrs. Maxtead, waiting in the dining-room, looked about her uneasily, then glanced at her watch. The French windows were closed, and the air in the room was stifling. She rose, walked to the window, then back to the table, lastly out into the hall. The corridor was dim; she traversed it hastily and stopped at Anna's door. There she knocked.

"Who is it?" The answer came after a pause.

"I — Jeanne. Won't you have any dinner?"

"I don't need dinner, thanks; I'll have some tea later. My head aches."

There was silence; then the thunder crackled across the sky. Mrs. Maxtead knocked again hastily.

"Let me in. Maurice and Doctor Penrhyn have gone; it 's uncanny getting through this storm alone."

There was a faint movement inside the room, then the sound of a key being turned. Mrs. Maxtead's hand was on the handle, she turned it instantly; then, immediately the door yielded, she drew back. "Good heavens, child!"

The room was dark, except for the occasional flashes that spun across it from the open window; the curtains were drawn back, and beyond the lawn and cliff the oily sea and rent sky were plainly to be seen in the intervals of weird light. Both inside and out the excessive warmth hung pulselessly on the air.

Mrs. Maxtead moved forward. "This is like the 'Inferno,'" she said, "only more gruesome. Where do you keep your matches? I can't go another second without a light."

"On the dressing-table." Anna had returned to the window and stood looking out. Another twist of light shot though the room.

Mrs. Maxtead walked to the table and picked up the matches. "You 're perfectly abominable," she began; but her words were drowned in a sweep of sound. "Anna! Shut that window and draw the curtains." She lighted the candles hastily, then walked across to the girl and caught her hand.

She drew her into the centre of the room; but there she paused. "Why, my dear child!" she said.

"My dear child!" She turned swiftly to the mantelpiece and rang the bell; then she walked to the window, let down the blind and drew the curtains. As the maid entered, she turned round.

"Bring some coffee and my box of cigarettes. We sha'n't dine to-night." She turned to Anna as the girl withdrew. "Now, you've got to rise above this storm. You've been frightening yourself to death; your eyes are absolutely scared."

Anna pushed the hair from her forehead; her face was very white, and there were black circles under her eyes.

"You've been looking out of that window for half an hour."

There was no reply.

"Anna!"

The girl moved to the dressing-table. There was a rigidity in her actions that was new. Her companion's eyes took on their critical look.

"Anna," she said, "is it really the storm at all? I have a lingering feeling that it's not."

Anna stood very still. "No, Jeanne, it's not storm."

Mrs. Maxtead sat down quietly. "You've told Maurice," she said directly, "and Maurice hasn't taken it well."

Anna shivered in spite of the heat. "Oh no, I haven't told him."

"Then what is it? I rather feel as if I'd dropped a link. Oh, how detestable that noise is!"

The thunder shook the house.

"I like it." Anna raised her head. "It seems to say all the things that I am afraid to say."

"Anna, Maurice is the straightest person I know."

"Oh, I know, Jeanne — I know." The girl crossed the room, pausing beside the bed. "You're very good to me, but can't you see that there are times when the best, the cleverest, the nicest woman in the world is of no use — no use at all. When one has to build up a wall and creep inside it till one can dare to creep out again." She stopped.

Her companion looked up. "It's a trying night," she said quietly; "a cigarette and a cup of coffee — "

Anna laughed suddenly. "A cigarette and a cup of coffee! How that bounds everything for you! Have you never felt your throat dry, and your tongue parched, and your brain icy cold?"

Mrs. Maxtead ignored the words. "That last peal sounded farther off," she said. "If only it was n't so deadly hot, one might manage to brace up."

The maid entered with the coffee; she looked pale and upset. Her mistress glanced at her. "You can go to bed," she said.

The air stifled. Anna walked to the window, then back to the bed. A fresh burst of thunder clattered overhead.

"How abominably near!" A cigarette slipped

from Mrs. Maxtead's hand. "Thunder to a woman is like a bogie to a child — it suggests the horrible potency of the unseen." She picked up the cigarette and held it to a candle flame. "Anna, do you think you could possibly sit still?"

Anna looked round. "No. I'll sit still for all the rest of my life, if you like, but not to-night. I feel as if I had been immovable for hours and hours and hours."

Mrs. Maxtead moved round sharply. "Stop!" she said. "Did you hear that?"

They both stayed motionless for a second; then they each drew breath. The sky seemed to tear asunder, then tumble headlong to the earth in a torrent of sound.

"The rain!"

"The rain at last!" Mrs. Maxtead walked to the window and held back the blind. The water was falling in a sheet across the lawn; the lightning played fitfully at the horizon; but already the note of the thunder was lowered, and a breath of cooler air came from the sea.

Anna walked to the window as well.

"Jeanne, I have a favour to ask."

Mrs. Maxtead raised her brows.

"I've been wanting to ask it ever since you came, but, somehow, it would n't get said." She paused and caught her breath. "Take me back to town to-morrow, Jeanne, instead of Thursday. I don't want to stay here another day." The

words were low and rapid, her voice sounded strained.

Mrs. Maxtead's lips parted; she turned hastily. "To-morrow! But, my dear child — " Then she stopped. "Very well. To-morrow at any hour you like." She let the blind drop.

PART TWO—CHAPTER XII

STRODE sat in his study. The windows were wide open, and the cool breeze blew in refreshingly from the sea; the rain had ceased as abruptly as it began, and except for an occasional distant growl, the thunder had died away. On the desk before him was an array of papers, but his hands rested on them idly, and his eyes had an abstracted look; it was only when a knock fell cautiously on the door, and an instant later the door itself opened, that his glance concentrated to life.

The old servant who had been his father's valet entered deprecatingly. "Sorry to disturb you, sir, but there 's a lady to see you."

"A lady, Straker?" Strode unconsciously glanced at the clock.

"Yes, sir. Shall I ask her to step in here, sir, or to wait in the drawing-room?"

"In here." Strode rose and pushed his papers aside. "Never mind, Straker; on second thoughts, I 'll see to it myself."

The old man stepped aside, and Strode walked quickly into the hall. His manner under unusual circumstances was always calm; whatever surprise

there may have been in his mind, there was none in his face, as he recognised the figure standing by the drawing-room door.

"Anna!" He held out his hand.

She touched it nervously with her fingers and looked up. "You are not angry?"

"Angry!" He laughed. "You are you. Can I say more than that? Come into the study; it's almost cool there."

They crossed the hall quietly, but once inside the room Strode closed the door, took her in his arms, and kissed her.

"That's to show that with us love comes first, always, in every emergency. Now, tell me what under heaven has made you come out on such a night — to say nothing of breaking all the conventionalities? You look like a ghost." He opened her cloak gently and took it off. Her light dress clung limp with the dampness of the air; the roses, still at her belt, were dead. He took them out and laid them on the table. "Nothing sordid was meant to touch you," he said. "You are too radiant for death — in any form."

She raised her eyes with a faint smile. "A radiant ghost, Maurice? What an anomaly!"

He drew her towards a chair. "Now sit down, and when you are quite ready tell me what has happened, but not till you are quite ready." He moved back considerately to the arrangement of his papers, and Anna sat down.

"It is very late." She looked at the clock.

"Only twelve."

"How long may I stay?"

"Fifteen minutes; I 'll take you back then. Who knows that you came?"

"No one. I slipped away."

"Good! Penrhyn drove off half an hour ago, and Straker is as discreet as the grave. So your sin won't find you out."

She looked up suddenly. "You don't think it hateful of me to have come?"

Strode's fingers were busy; when he answered, his voice came rather low. "If I were to be honest, Anna, I 'd say that I 've seldom felt quite so proud. It 's your first admission of reliance." He stopped.

She rose suddenly and stood behind him. "We are leaving to-morrow, Maurice; we go to town by the first train."

He turned with a jerk. "What do you say? To-morrow?"

She gazed fixedly at the desk. "Jeanne has business that can't wait."

The perplexity left his eyes and he smiled. "Quite absurd, my dear child! I saw Mrs. Maxtead at eight; she never said a word of such a thing."

"She did n't know at eight."

"Oh, a telegram?"

Anna bent her head.

Strode smoothed his hair. "That 's very hate-

ful," he said after a pause, "very hateful. But you must cheer up! You must cheer up! It isn't so bad, after all." He looked at her and smiled. "You 'll lose the poppies and the sea for a bit; but you 'll still have me. You don't think I 'm going to be left behind?" He smoothed his hair afresh and laughed reassuringly. "I was looking into things, as you came in; I find I can be spared from here. I 'll be in town a day or two after you."

Anna's head remained bent. He put out his hand and touched her arm. "Dearest, we 'll have a jolly time in town?"

She raised her head with an effort. "You know it was n't to say silly things that I came."

"'T was never to tell me the famous secret? That secret that you did me out of on the cliff." He laughed again with an eager attempt to amuse her; then suddenly his face clouded over, and he caught both her hands. "Anna," he said in a different voice, "what 's the matter with you to-night?"

She met his eyes steadily. She had braced herself to the ordeal as she crossed the cliff. "I 'm not well, that 's all. Heaps of women would be limp after such a storm."

"Poor little girl! Sit down again and let me take care of you?"

She shook her head. "It 's easier to talk standing. I must say what I came to say."

He made a resigned gesture.

"It is n't very easy to say, Maurice."

His eyes narrowed. "It is n't that you think you 've ceased to care, or — or any rubbish of that sort?"

She smiled faintly. "No; it is n't rubbish of that sort."

"Then what else counts?"

"Nothing — and a lot of things."

"Let 's have it out."

Her lips parted twice before she spoke; then she straightened herself. "I have thought about your coming to town, Maurice; I 've thought that you would want to come; and I came to-night to tell you that you must n't, that you must stay here — that you must promise me to stay here." She freed her hands and clasped them tightly behind her back.

Strode stared at her in silence.

"It was to say that that I came. I did n't want to go without seeing you; I did n't want to put it in a letter. I know it sounds irrational, but women are full of whims."

He still stared incredulously. "What exactly does it mean? I suppose I have some right to ask."

"Maurice!"

He turned and walked to the open window.

"Maurice, you are angry?"

"Not angry."

"Hurt?"

"Possibly; I don't quite know."

She stood for a second uncertainly in the centre of the room ; then she crossed to where he stood.

"Maurice, you know that I care for you?"

"I know that *I* care for you." He looked steadily out into the darkness.

"Maurice, I count you the most generous person I know. You know nothing about me, and you have never asked anything. You have taken me all on trust. Few men would do that."

He remained motionless. "You are Mrs. Maxtead's cousin ; you live with her. What was there to ask?"

She shook her head. "That does n't fill everything. We each have some personal thing to make life difficult ; each our own responsibilities, as I told you this morning. In these three weeks I have been forgetting mine, and to-night they have wakened me up." She paused.

He turned swiftly. "Then this business is yours, not Mrs. Maxtead's?"

She looked away. "Hers and mine. Our affairs are one."

"And you are in trouble?" With an abrupt gesture he put out his hand. "What a jealous inconsiderate savage I have been!"

She laid her cold fingers in his and smiled. "Thank you, Maurice. Just for a minute I feared — and — and I could n't have fought a battle to-night. I feel so tired."

Without a word he passed his arm round her and

drew her back to the desk. "There will be no battles for you while I am here to fight them. Whatever this thing is that has risen up to bother you, it must be left to me — to me, you understand."

She touched her lips with her handkerchief, and slowly gathered up her strength. "After this, Maurice," she corrected gently, "after this, things will be left to you; but in this one case I must act for myself. I 'm afraid there 's no drawing back."

"Which implies — ?" He searched her face.

Her lips were cold, but she met his gaze staunchly. "Which implies, Maurice, that something has happened that I never counted on, never looked for; something that involves other people besides myself. And I want you to give me the greatest help it 's in your power to give; I want you to let me think of you here — away from the hateful harassing world — thinking of me and believing in me, till I can send for you. You know that I 'll send the first moment that I can?"

"My dear child, the harassing world is a man's place."

"The finer of him to relinquish it for a little."

Strode's eyes were puzzled and perplexed. "Women are incomprehensible!" he said at last. "First a mysterious secret, now a mysterious mission; it sounds like the last century. How many days will this thing take, provided I do consent?"

"Four weeks from to-day."

He took a step backward. "Weeks! Do you know what you are saying?"

"Perfectly; to an hour."

"But a month — a whole month! What does it mean? What under heaven am I to do with myself for a month?" He looked blank.

"As you have done every other year. Sail and fish and read." She stopped, checked by the look in his eyes.

He came quite close to her and took her hands. "That is a very easy programme to make out," he said; "but you don't know what you say. Sailing and fishing are poor sport when one has tried love. You can tell me to stay away from you, but you can't do more than tell."

Her fingers showed white against his; she looked unsteadily round the room, then slowly, reluctantly, her glance returned to his.

"Maurice, you said to-night that you were proud of my relying on you. Have I relied too much?"

His hand tightened on hers, then relaxed; he dropped her fingers and turned again to the window.

There was a long wait. Anna made no movement, but her face looked very tired.

At last Strode spoke without looking round. "Man makes a poor sort of lover, after all, Anna; he needs a lot of reminding."

She took a step forward. "Maurice?"

He was silent.

"Maurice?"

He wheeled round and looked at her. "Have n't you known all along that a saint would give you anything you asked, if you only put it to him straight? I don't know what you want to do; but I trust you like myself. Of course I 'll wait."

PART TWO—CHAPTER XIII

MRS. MAXTEAD paused with her fingers on the handle of Anna's door. Eight days had passed since the night of the storm at Trescar, and she was once more in her town house. Her fingers moved restlessly for a second, then the handle turned, the door yielded, and she entered the room. A light air came through the window; the sun danced gaily from the mirrors to the floor. She turned directly towards the bed.

"I have been awake all night," she said, "like a girl after her first dance. The stage and the audience and you kept whizzing through my brain like a wheel. It was a superb success! Superb! How do you feel?"

Anna was sitting up in bed; she looked fragile and tired; her face, in contrast to her red hair, seemed as white as her wrapper or the pillows that propped her up. On a table by her side was a tray with a barely tasted breakfast; and spread over the coverlet, in a disorder of open pages, were half-a-dozen newspapers. She put out her hand languidly.

"Yes, Jeanne; I suppose they have accepted me."

Mrs. Maxtead's eyes sparkled. "Accepted? What a word! They have gone mad; it's the seal on your success. You were magnificent. I have never seen anything so fine. You have more grit than I ever thought."

Anna was silent; then she smiled very faintly and looked up. "I think it's you who have the grit, Jeanne. Do you think I haven't seen — all this terrible week? Seen you watching me, seen the doubt in your mind, though you never asked a question, never hinted by a word that I was not — not quite the same? I am not so dense." Her voice was very low.

Mrs. Maxtead began folding and sorting the papers. "It has been the most awful week of my life. There were times — but that doesn't count now. Last night compensated for everything. Last night was like the lifting of a coffin-lid to a man who is buried alive. I don't believe I stirred a hair's-breadth during the whole first act."

Anna drew a long breath. "I knew last night would be all right. It was the waiting for last night; it was the reception — your reception on Thursday." She shivered and closed her eyes. "I shall never forget that reception, Jeanne, never — never. The coldness of my hands and feet; the feeling of being outside myself; the crowds and crowds of faces — all inquisitive, all on tiptoe as it were, all blankly, candidly disappointed. I shall never forget it. It was a nightmare." She covered her face.

Mrs. Maxtead was silent for a moment, her fingers stirring and rustling amongst the papers; at last her eyelids drooped.

"We won't talk about the reception," she said shortly, "it's burned into my brain. But there is something that I want to say." She paused, then went on again. "Ever since we left Trescar I have thought of nobody but you; I have shown more patience than I ever dreamt I possessed; I have been inhuman — nothing less. Now that the ordeal of the first night is over, the actual crisis got through, I want you to consider me a little — to consider what it costs a woman to be silent for eight days. You talk of nightmares; every nightmare must have a cause. Tell me frankly what happened at Trescar the night before we left? Till that night you were perfectly happy, I never saw you so buoyant, so full of life; then all in an hour everything collapsed. Since then you have been the mere shadow of yourself; you go about with your eyes open, seeing nothing; you are interested in nothing; you scarcely hear when you are spoken to. Except for last night, you have been living in a trance. For heaven's sake, rouse yourself! Shake it off!" She touched the girl's arm.

Anna moved languidly and turned her face away.

"Anna, you rose above it last night. Rise above it now."

Anna smiled a little. "Ah, that was the dramatic situation. I am not to be praised for that. It is

in my blood, I suppose; I act as a dog hunts — by instinct." She moved her face restlessly against the pillows.

Mrs. Maxtead still held her arm. "It is not a quarrel between you and Maurice; I know that. With your temperaments you would have made it up in twelve hours; it is something more lasting than a quarrel. Can't you confide in me?"

Anna drew her arm away. "I can't; I haven't put it to myself as yet." She pushed back her hair with her habitual gesture. "At present I am an automaton; I know that I have to play every night for three weeks — and play well. After the three weeks —"

Mrs. Maxtead moved nearer by a step. "After the three weeks there is your big rest, your six months' rest; then the contract with Polotski — if you consent, and the terms tempt us. After last night we should control the market. But first the rest; I am set on that now more than ever. We must burn back the colour into this." She touched the girl's cheek. "You know the proverb of the willing horse."

Anna smiled again wearily.

"Come, you 'll enjoy the rest?"

The girl stared straight before her.

"Weeks and weeks of no responsibility — no study — no rehearsals."

Anna's eyelids quivered, otherwise she was absolutely still.

Mrs. Maxtead watched her warily, then slowly drew herself upright. "My dear Anna," she said sharply, "this is intolerable. It 's wicked! It 's a crime!"

A slight flush spread across Anna's cheek, but she made no reply.

Her companion waited for none. She was standing very straight, and her fingers mechanically twisted her wedding-ring round and round. "I have been too lenient," she said, "I am going to tell you now exactly what I think. I think you are defying Fate — hitting your head against a stone wall. You are the luckiest girl I know — or have ever known. The nicest man on earth worships you. Only the other night all London — the London that 's worth knowing — crowded here to meet you; not six invitations were refused. And last night you crowned your whole career; yet you lie there, dead and cold and dumb, wrapped inside yourself — impossible — unreachable."

Anna covered her face again.

"You must wake up! You must realise! In every crisis in existence, as I have told you again and again, there is the need of action. You must act! Do you hear? You must act!"

Anna cowered back into the pillows.

"You are losing your hold on things. Any day Maurice may discover who you are. I told you long ago the necessity of telling him yourself. Any day he may see a picture of you. I know the illustrated

papers do not get to Trescar; I know Maurice cares nothing for them; still — still, one can never tell. There are no hermitages nowadays."

Anna's fingers parted limply. "Sometimes, Jeanne, I wish that Maurice would find out. It would simplify a lot of things."

Mrs. Maxtead made no comment, but she ceased to twist her ring.

"Anna," she said softly, "you have not, by any chance, heard from your own people?" Her voice was very low, but as keen as a needle-point.

A flood of colour suffused the girl's face, then died painfully away. Her eyelids opened slowly and she looked up. "No, Jeanne, on my word of honour!" Her lashes drooped again.

For a while Mrs. Maxtead stayed motionless. Then she walked across the room. There was an unwonted shadow in her eyes, a perplexed line between her brows. She stopped by the mantelpiece, and, leaning against it, looked down at the white lilac in the grate.

"You have never told me a lie, Anna! And yet —"

"I have told you the truth now. How could I have heard from them? They know nothing of me — nothing of where I am." Her voice was monotonous and tired.

"Of course not, and yet — Oh, I admit myself beaten!" She lifted her head. "Against a doggedly indifferent woman there is no weapon under the sun."

She walked quickly towards the door, then in the centre of the room she paused. Her hands were hanging by her sides, and her eyes gleamed.

"Anna," she said suddenly, "for heaven's sake, cry! Lose your temper or cry. Do something — do anything, only don't lie there like that. You look as if you were seeing ghosts!" She laid her hands on the foot-rail of the bed and leant forward.

Anna remained unmoved. "I haven't cried since that morning at Trescar, when I told you about Maurice. I don't know that I shall ever cry again!"

"Then tell me what it is? There's nothing that two people — two determined people — cannot do. I am as capable of helping you as a man — more capable. Anna?"

There was a note in the last word that Anna had not heard before. Its appeal cut through her; she suddenly raised herself.

"Oh, Jeanne!" she said brokenly. "I'm doing my best. Indeed, indeed, I'm doing my best! If you care for me the littlest bit, don't question me any more." Her voice rose.

Mrs. Maxtead walked round to her former position beside the bed and laid her hand on the girl's shoulder. But Anna pushed it excitedly aside.

"No! Let me say what I can say now — while I want to say it. Something has happened: it doesn't matter what. When there is a fire at sea and people are killed, it doesn't much matter

whether they are burnt or drowned. They are dead, and that is enough. Something has fallen on me and left me stunned; as yet I am neither reconciled nor beaten — only stunned. I can't talk to you about it, because I haven't talked about it to myself. Some day soon, when my courage begins to shake itself out, I will face it and see where I stand. Then, for the first time in my whole life, Jeanne, I will really know myself. Whatever is strongest — the best or the worst — will come to the top. But now — now I am nothing — just a shuttlecock tossed between two bats; a feather blown on the wind; anything you like to think of that has neither grip nor weight nor hold — that just exists." Her eyes looked fixedly in front of her, her hands were clasped about her knees. "That's all I have to say — except one thing." Her hands relaxed and she turned her eyes on her companion's face. "Long ago you won me over by a trick — by a subterfuge; but that's past now. We are all honest or dishonest according to our lights. According to yours you meant magnificently by me — and you have done magnificently. I haven't forgotten, and I sha'n't forget. I'll play for you loyally every night of the three weeks. You may count on that. Whatever my days are like, my nights will be all right." Her voice suddenly dropped; she smiled wearily and put out her hand. "Loyally, Jeanne. Remember."

Mrs. Maxtead took the hand and held it in silence.

Her face was averted; she looked towards the window and the sun.

"I have always been proud of you, Anna," she said at length, — "quite ridiculously proud. Somehow — somehow I think I 'm prouder of you to-day than I have ever been." She dropped the hand, and walking abruptly to the window, let down the blind.

PART TWO—CHAPTER XIV

IT was late afternoon on the last day in May. Rain had fallen heavily in the morning, but with the drying capacity of the London streets the pavements were clean again, though the heat that had prevailed for a fortnight was allayed.

Mrs. Maxtead stepped out of her brougham and paused on the doorstep of her house before inserting her latch-key. She turned round, and her glance moved restlessly from the trees to the sky, washed free of clouds; from the sky back again. She looked older than was customary as she stood in the full flood of light; the faint lines about her mouth seemed deeper, the set of her lips harder than was usual. She looked a woman who was bearing a mental strain, the weight of which she hardly admitted to herself. Presently she sighed, then caught herself up impatiently and opened the door.

The hall was empty. She threw her parasol on a table and mounted the stairs. The first door on the corridor was Anna's; she stopped outside it and tapped. Getting no answer, she shrugged her shoulders, walked away, and pushed her own door open with a jerk. Then she raised her eyebrows.

"Anna! I've just been looking for you."

Anna rose from the desk, a bundle of letters in her hand. She wore no hat, but her arms were slipped loosely through the sleeves of her fur travelling-wrap. Mrs. Maxtead noted the point.

"Fur in May! How un-English!" She drew off her gloves.

The other laughed a little nervously. "I felt cold. I have been writing business letters; you see I used your desk — to give me inspiration."

Mrs. Maxtead nodded. "Business is rather petrifying. Who were the letters to?"

"No one of account. I was writing cheques and paying bills. I was seeing how I stand."

"My dear Anna, what a waste of time! The glory of being rich is the fact of being able to ignore money; to be really Arcadian one should be a millionaire."

Anna stood silent. She was toying with the letters in her hand; occasionally she lifted her hand and pushed back her hair. "I wrote one letter that was not about business," she said at length.

Mrs. Maxtead carefully removed her hat and veil, then, with elaborate indifference, looked into the glass. "You are indefatigable," she said.

Anna stirred a little. "Don't be flippant, Jeanne, the letter was to Maurice."

Mrs. Maxtead's hand almost trembled, but she controlled the impulse; she adjusted a hairpin and studied the effect. "But you write to Maurice every other day. I wish you would be more casual about trivial things."

"This letter was different from the others."

"How original! It 's quite hard to get variety in love letters; they are like one-stringed instruments."

Anna walked back to the desk; her face was flushed, but she shivered with nervous cold. "Do take it seriously, Jeanne; I want you to understand."

"Well, say on."

"I have decided that Maurice must know."

Mrs. Maxtead turned from the glass. "I am so glad," she said quickly. "So very glad. I hope you have used all your tact! Tact is more essential to life than bread."

Anna touched the top of the desk tentatively. "I 'm afraid I have not used any tact."

"What?"

"Oh, don't blame me, Jeanne; don't blame me. If I have made an error, no one will suffer but myself. I have done as I think best — as seems best to me."

Mrs. Maxtead looked at her slowly. "A mistake never involves one person alone; don't imagine that. What exactly have you done?"

The girl was silent for a moment; her fingers moved slowly to and fro. At last she looked up. "This is Friday; my engagement at the 'Corinthian' ends to-morrow night." She stopped.

Mrs. Maxtead nodded. She felt the sense of impending knowledge, was conscious of it with a half-realised dread. "Yes," she said in a quiet voice.

"Well, Maurice will know to-morrow. Don't look

at me like that. It seems as if your eyes were boring holes. I have thought it out — all of it." She spoke fast. "He must know, and I cannot tell him — and cannot write. There is only one way left; he must see for himself." She paused and passed her handkerchief over her lips; the gesture was unusual to her, one that never suggested itself, save in strong excitement. Mrs. Maxtead saw it and made a mental note.

"Explain?" she said.

"Oh, can't you see for yourself? Can't you understand? I have written to Maurice, asking him to come up from Trescar to-morrow. He will arrive late in the afternoon; he will want to see me as soon as possible. Now, it is the height of the season, and few people in town have an evening to spare. What more natural than that we should meet at a place of amusement? What more natural than that you should have a box at the 'Corinthian'?"

"Anna! Are you out of your senses?"

Anna lifted her head. "Sometimes I think I am. Do you remember the night we dined with Maurice at Trescar? Do you remember what Doctor Penrhyn said about geniuses? Perhaps you are right, after all; perhaps I am a genius, and perhaps this is my mad time." She laughed unsteadily.

Mrs. Maxtead moved across to her, but she drew away. "Don't touch me, Jeanne; I could n't bear to be touched just now. I am all" — she made an effective gesture — "I am all in little bits."

The other walked back to the dressing-table and rested against it, looking at the girl with attentive eyes. For once, it seemed, she could find nothing to say.

Anna's fingers pressed the letters in her hand; her nervousness was rising, but she made a strenuous effort to keep it in control.

"Look at something else, Jeanne; I abominate being summed up."

Mrs. Maxtead lowered her lids. "My dear child," she said, "I'd turn that matter over quite three times, if I were you. Never put a man in a false position, if you have any other course; even love can be killed by a single incident — if the incident be strong enough. It's a preposterous way of breaking it to him. Perfectly preposterous!"

Anna set her lips. "It's the way I wish to do it."

"Why not write?"

"Because I cannot. I know you don't understand, and I know that I can't explain; so it must rest there. But I have been trying to write it for a week past, and every time the pen sticks — literally sticks."

"Let me write for you? With half a sheet of notepaper Maurice can be made to understand. It was a joke in the first instance — a very harmless joke; afterwards, you fell in love — that covers everything. Maurice isn't a Puritan or an imbecile. He isn't the sort of man to shut his wife into a harem. After the first little wound to his vanity,

he will be prouder of you than I am. There is n't a man living who would n't lose his head over your preference. Let me write? Find me a pen and let 's make an end of it once for all?"

Anna remained rigid. "You don't understand. I want him to see it all in a flash — one big flash. I have my reasons; I know exactly what I am doing."

"It is a very dangerous game. A man can have an overdose of enlightenment."

"I know; but you don't understand."

Mrs. Maxtead shrugged her shoulders. "And as 'Sappho'?"

The girl turned. "I meant it to be 'Sappho.' I want to make no sentimental appeal."

The other laughed curtly. "And did you suppose that I would assist at the *dénoûment?*"

"No. I supposed you would stay at home. I tell you because I want you to know, not because I want you to co-operate. I have told Maurice to be in good time and to wait in the box; he won't have to wait very long."

"No. Ten minutes ought to set him right." Mrs. Maxtead's manner was dry.

Anna looked down at her letters. "I think I have said everything now, Jeanne."

"You have said a good deal; I almost think it 's my turn." Her eyes gleamed and she dropped her bantering tone. "You are grown up, Anna, and you have a great future in front of you; but to me

you are still a child. In my eyes you will always be young. I will always look back on you from my thirteen years' start. Now, in dealing with a child, what are one's principles? Reward it when it 's good; punish it when it 's bad; always, under all conditions, shield it from its own mistakes. I have no intention of letting you work this scheme. If you are mad, all the more reason for my sanity. You shall not post the letter while I am here."

Anna said nothing, but her eyes grew very dark. "I am sorry to disappoint you, Jeanne."

Mrs. Maxtead's expression became set. "I never beg, you know that. I forbid you to post it."

Anna's colour paled a little. "I am very, very sorry, Jeanne."

"Then you set me absolutely aside?"

"I act as I think best."

They looked at each other silently, then Mrs. Maxtead came straight across the space that divided them.

"In dealing with an insane person, one is justified in anything." She made a swift forward movement, and her hand grazed the letters.

Anna swerved aside, and the blood rushed back into her face. With nervous haste she walked to the mantelpiece and pressed the bell.

Mrs. Maxtead fingered her rings. "Anna, there are some acts that a woman would give much to recall — when it is too late."

Anna looked straight in front of her.

The maid entered and glanced questioningly from one to the other.

Anna turned to her. "I rang, Céleste. Have these letters posted at once." She held them out.

Mrs. Maxtead was standing by the dressing-table. As Céleste moved across the room, she made a step forward, her lips parted, then closed again; she shrugged her shoulders and turned aside.

"Some day I shall write a treatise on 'Woman,'" she said lightly. "I think it ought to sell."

PART TWO—CHAPTER XV

EIGHT o'clock struck as Strode stood on the steps of his club and looked down on the progress of life. London, in the ordinary course of things, possessed slight attraction for him; but to-night he saw it through its own blue haze of evening, whose mystery enveloped and beautified almost beyond belief.

He stood contemplatively still, his hands in the pockets of his coat, a cigar between his lips. There are moments in the life of every man when events seem too complete to admit of haste; when, through the very impatience of desire, he loiters on the brink of fulfilment.

Presently a man lounged up the steps and nodded to him in passing. "Hallo, Strode!" he said. "That you?"

Strode's reverie melted. He turned with a cordial impulse and held out his hand.

"Hallo, Strangfield! How are you? How are you?"

The other returned the pressure of his hand vaguely. "Bound for the old grind?" he asked, indicating the town.

Strode smiled. "A lot hangs on a point of view," he said. "You should have yourself buried for four

weeks; after that, I expect, you 'd talk more politely of life."

Strangfield gazed at him attentively through his eyeglass. "You look as if you 'd struck something," he said at last slowly. "What is it? A woman or a winner?"

Strode was silent for a moment; then he laughed with deep amusement.

"You 've hit it, old chap! I have struck something; but I don't think I 'll put a name to it. Somehow — somehow, Strangfield, I rather fancy you would n't understand." He laughed again long and pleasantly, then suddenly slapped the other on the shoulder and ran down the steps.

Strangfield stood immovable for a second; then his eyeglass dropped from his eye, he turned about meditatively, and passed through the big swinging doors.

Strode walked forward for a dozen rapid steps, then stopped and hailed a hansom.

"'Corinthian' Theatre!" he called as he sprang inside. The doors closed, and he leant luxuriously back. At all times optimistic and light-hearted, to-night he felt well disposed towards the entire universe. In his pocket was Anna's letter; behind him lay the four weeks of probation; before him the future of boundless hopes and the present of delightful certainty. He was at ease with all the world and with himself.

Arrived at the theatre he paid the cabman twice

his fare, and strolled into the vestibule with the half-humorous smile that Strangfield had raised still lingering round his mouth. The vestibule was large, and entering it he paused interestedly and looked about; with a tinge of peculiar feeling it struck him that here was the stronghold of the woman whose story had affected him long ago. It was a curious whim of Anna's to choose it as their meeting-place. He paused on the thought, and a new idea started in his mind; for almost the first time he found himself wondering what this woman's face was like. Her pictures were sure to be about — such people always advertised. He glanced round the walls, but no pictures were to be seen; then he remembered impatiently that it was the last night of the engagement, and such things as pictures were already packed away. With a contemptuous amusement at his passing curiosity, he mixed with the increasing crowd that filled the vestibule, and moving past one laughing group and then another, reached the office and asked for Mrs. Maxtead's box.

The letter of the box was murmured to him, then repeated to an attendant, and he was ushered along a corridor carpeted in green. He noticed that the colouring was green, in contrast to the usual red of such a place; it was the sole detail of the elaborately-fitted theatre that afterwards stayed in his mind.

A wave of disappointment touched him as the door was opened and the vacant box met his eyes;

then he caught himself up impatiently as a portion of Anna's letter recurred to his mind. "It may be ten minutes past the half hour when you see me," it ran, "but be kind — kind and very lenient, as you always are." How exaggerative women were! But how exceedingly lovable! His expression softened; the door closed on the attendant, and taking off his hat and coat, he hung them up.

He smoothed his hair, and passed his hand tentatively over his chin. "It felt a very decent shave," he said half aloud. "But a woman's eyes are so deuced keen —" The sentence broke away. From below came the short, peremptory tap of the conductor's bâton, the faint shifting of seats and arranging of instruments, then the first melodious note of the overture that prefaced the first act of the play.

He moved to the front of the box, sat down and opened his programme; he glanced through it superficially, but his eye lingered on the last name, "'Sappho' — Mdlle. Solny." He smiled grimly and laid the paper aside. The overture ceased; a babel of laughter and talk and a waving of fans seemed to fill the air; the perfume of flowers and scent rose distinctly from the stalls. He leant out, then leant back and drew his watch from an inner pocket. The hands marked half-past eight; he moved impatiently and altered the position of his chair.

An audible rustle ran through the house as women settled themselves more comfortably; the hum of voices slackened, then suddenly died out; the orches-

tra played a soft bar or two, and in expectant silence the curtain rose.

The scene was severe and unadorned — Jean Gaussin's rooms in the Rue Jacob; the sombre carpet, the desk massed with work, the student's lamp — each detail suggestive and impressive in its way. The rise of the curtain disclosed Gaussin in converse with his uncle from the country. Strode leant back in his seat; the perfect pronunciation of the French pleased him, but to the motive of the words he paid only partial heed. The reformed *roué*, roused by the town to the remembrance of his past, interested him not at all; though the boy Gaussin, with his fair hair, young colouring, and sensitive voice, seemed better worth watching, as bit by bit — with little rushes of enthusiasm, sudden shy haltings — he told the story of the ball at Déchelette's studio; of the woman in the Egyptian dress, with the wide grey eyes, and the forehead ornaments of steel; of the wild night that followed; the home-coming to this very room; the terrible, prophetic ascent of the long stairs — its gay beginning, its almost overwhelming end. It was a studied piece of acting, ending with pointed force where the boy, with a swift touch of reserve, breaks in on his uncle's laugh, and with a shrug of the shoulders that snaps the subject off, nods to the mirror, where a woman's card is stuck between an invitation to the Affaires Étrangères and the programme of the studio ball, and turning to his desk, picks up a ponderous

book. It was well done, and possessed the suggestion of events to come. But a man in love is not the ideal critic of a play. Strode looked again at his watch, then he looked towards the door of the box. The watch marked ten minutes past the half hour; with an impatient sigh he turned again to the stage.

The uncle Césaire had shuffled out of sight; Gaussin sat at his desk, his elbows resting on it, his forehead supported by his hands, the green shade of the lamp reflected on his engrossed face.

Strode pushed back his chair and rose; as he did so a faint knock fell on the door of Gaussin's room. He noticed, in a preoccupied way, that the audience was very still — breathlessly still; as he crossed the box he heard Gaussin's short impatient "Come in!"

He put his hand on the door leading into the corridor, then he stood still. A roar of applause shook the house. It swayed upwards and downwards deafeningly, like the thunder of the sea; it sank away to a whisper, then broke forth again, tumultuous and electrifying. Strode's hand relaxed. He stood irresolute: then, following a very human impulse, walked back to the front of the box. There he stood motionless — his hands on the back of his chair — his figure erect and very stiff.

The door at the back of Gaussin's room had opened, and "Sappho" herself was on the stage. She stood quite still, one hand resting on the lintel of the door,

her head held up; a large hat drooped over her face, a curve of red hair caught the light above her wonderful eyes; her dress shimmered, and her teeth, between her parted lips, gleamed. She was "Sappho" as Daudet has drawn her in the height of her intoxication. When the tumult of applause had died away, she turned to Gaussin with a slight gesture.

"It is I, you see . . . I return . . ." The accent was very perfect — the faintly delicate suggestion of the Russian burr, to be caught by an over-attentive ear, added piquancy and individuality to the voice. To Strode, standing in strained attention, every sound came clear and fine as a bell; every intonation sprang through his mind with the speed and vividness of light, shaking his thoughts as a violent concussion might have done. Very slowly, almost methodically, he passed his hand four or five times over his hair; then he turned, and moving into the centre of the box, paused.

He stood for five minutes without a movement; then the physical crampedness of his position forced him to stir. He walked slowly across the narrow space to where his coat was hung; he lifted it from its peg, looked at it, and put it back again; then with great deliberation he retraced his steps. In the middle of the box he paused afresh, drew out his watch, and wound it with peculiar attentive care. This done, he moved forward stiffly, and taking up his first position, sat there with scarcely a change of attitude till the curtain fell. At the first outbreak

of applause he rose with a rapidity that overturned his chair, and walked out into the corridor.

From the various exits people were already filing out. It was noticeable that in the thickest of the press men moved aside to let him pass, and stared after him when he had gone. In the vestibule he walked straight to an attendant.

"How can I get to the back?" he said.

The man looked at him. "The back, sir — ?"

Strode turned. "God in heaven, man, can't you understand English?" His tone was very low, but it pierced the attendant's brain. He drew back.

"Behind, sir, you mean," he corrected hastily. "The stage-door in Green Street — round the corner. Can I find you your hat, sir?" But Strode was gone.

In two minutes he had found the stage-door, and without a second's pause had pushed it open. He took a perfunctory glance round the bare walls, at the occasional men and women hurrying to and fro, at the flaring gas-jets in their cages; then he walked quickly to the little office where the door-keeper lounged over an evening paper. He took out a card and laid it on the ledge.

"For Mdlle. Solny," he said laconically; then he turned his back.

The man picked up the card, eyed it, then turned his attention to its owner. "Very sorry, sir —"

Strode turned sharply. "Don't waste time. Send up the card."

"Very sorry, sir, but the lady never sees nobody during a performance. Orders are very strict, sir." The man fiddled with the card.

Strode took a step forward, looked round the temporarily empty passage, then wheeled again and laid a sovereign on the desk.

The man glanced at it thoughtfully, but shook his head.

Strode looked at him steadily, and drawing out a second sovereign laid it by the first. "I give you four minutes," he said, looking at the clock.

The door-keeper moved a little. "It's risking my place, sir —"

Without a word Strode drew out a third coin.

The man moved uncomfortably, passed the back of his hand across his mouth, looked slowly round, and then touched the gold speculatively.

"It is n't the matter of the money, sir."

Strode laughed harshly. "Oh, that 's understood. Call somebody, and look sharp."

The man shuffled a little more, laid his hand on a bell, then paused. "I 'll go myself, sir. If anybody passes in, tell 'em I 'll be back." He picked up the coins, came out of his office, and moved away. At the turn of the passage he looked back. "Evenin' paper 's on the desk, sir."

Strode turned to him. "What the devil are you waiting for?"

Left to himself, he paced up and down. His stolidity was gone; his energy was alive and goad-

ing him; his activity ran like wildfire through his blood. He took out a cigar, bit off the end and lighted it, then threw it aside. The minutes seemed hours; his impatience was at fever heat. Then at last the shuffling steps of the door-keeper came to his ears. He ran down the passage and met the man.

"That 'll do," he said sharply. "Just show me the way."

The man hesitated.

"Well, man, out with it!"

"I saw her maid, sir — not the dresser, sir, but her own maid; and she said — "

"Well?"

"What I told you, sir. The lady never sees nobody during the play."

Strode made an exclamation and turned away.

"That was n't all, sir."

"Ah!"

"No, sir, I was n't to be put off; I stuck at it. At last, sir, she took in your card."

"Good! And then?"

"Mdlle. was most regretful, sir, but — " He paused to draw a heavy breath. "She 's not over well to-night, sir, and could n't see you. She hoped you 'd understand — "

Strode moved away; for the moment it seemed that he had forgotten the speaker's existence. Reaching the door, he pulled it open and stood on the step, looking out into the narrow silent street;

then suddenly he turned and walked back into the passage.

"What time does she leave the theatre, after the show 's done?"

"Eleven forty-five, sir; never sooner, sir."

"Never sooner? Thanks!" He nodded curtly and turned away; the stage-door closed behind him with a bang.

When he regained the vestibule people were moving back into the house; the second act was due. He mounted the stairs quickly, then stopped and glanced into the fast-emptying bar. The women behind the counter were gossiping together in a group; a few men lingered over their drinks. He turned sharply and entered.

"Brandy-and-soda!" he said laconically; then suddenly he caught sight of his face in the mirror. He took a step backward and drew in his breath; then he passed his hand once more across his hair.

"Say," he said abruptly, "you can leave the soda out."

PART TWO—CHAPTER XVI

AT one minute past twelve Strode knocked sharply at the house in Palace Court. He was quite as neat in appearance, quite as well groomed as ever, but the patent leather of his boots was soiled with mud, and the ends of his trousers were slightly splashed with it. Without any preliminary ceremony he walked past Branks into the hall.

"Your mistress?" he queried shortly.

"Mrs. Maxtead is in the boudoir, sir. Shall I —?"

"No. I think I know the room; I'll go right in." He walked across the hall and lifted the dividing curtain.

The windows were open, and the blinds fluttered slightly in the draught of his entrance. It was still a room of soft colouring, as it had been on the day of Anna's first visit; the lamplight glowed through pink shades, and in the grate long sprays of pink roses were massed in purple bowls. At the farther end Mrs. Maxtead lay on a couch drawn close to the window, a book held open in her hand. She rose slowly as Strode appeared.

"Where is Anna?" he asked curtly, as he held out his hand.

She raised her eyebrows. "My dear Maurice, I had almost asked the same question. You have seen her last?"

He moved impatiently. "I've been to the 'Corinthian,' but that doesn't count. After the first act I sent up my card, but she wouldn't see me. I left the theatre then and walked — anywhere — everywhere." He looked down at his boots. "I thought of going back and meeting her as she came away — I even reached Green Street; then I changed my mind. After all, it was her privilege to see me or not as she pleased; no man has the right to dog a woman in a public place. I came here instead. She hasn't arrived?"

Mrs. Maxtead walked back to the couch and sat down. "Not as yet. The carriage meets her at a quarter to twelve; she seldom gets here before a quarter past."

There was silence for a while. Strode walked to the mantelpiece and stood with his back to it. His hat was still in his hand, he stared down at it vaguely. All the while his companion watched him with vigilant eyes; at last she spoke, tentatively and very low.

"Have you looked in the glass to-night, Maurice?"

He started, and laughed uneasily. "Oh, I know what you mean! I did see my face about three hours ago. It looked exactly like my uncle's when he's rowing the men or negotiating a big deal. Queer things likenesses!"

There was a fresh pause. Three minutes passed, then five. Mrs. Maxtead touched each of her rings separately, drew one off, slipped it on again, then tapped her book. "Maurice, if you have a spark of consideration, say something! I never put in a ghastlier time of suspense than I have done to-night. I dined in my own room, and sat there till the furniture turned into ghosts; I came for comfort to the dining-room, and there Anna's picture stared me out of countenance; then I fled in here, but here there was a ticking clock, warranted to drive one frenzied in half an hour. I had just looked in a drawer and opened the windows when you arrived. Your knock on the front door — but I won't say anything about that. I believe I understand at last what people mean by nerves —" She twisted her book restlessly and tried to laugh.

Strode stood silent.

"Maurice!"

"Yes."

"Oh!" She brought her hands together and the book fell. "How dense you are! Why do you stand there like a mute? Is this mystery a disease? Does it hang about in germs? I tell you I have been breathing it in — been living in it — been suffocated by it for four whole weeks. I feel like annihilating the next person who looks at me blankly and answers in a monosyllable."

Strode crossed the room and picked up the book. "What do you want?" he asked.

She sat up straight and looked at him. "You have seen Anna; you know all there is to know. What is the result?"

He walked to the window and, holding back the blind, looked out. "If you want plain speaking," he said, "I have been in hell ever since."

Each word fell with distinct precision. For the first time in a lengthy space of years Mrs. Maxtead's guard of callousness lost its hold, and her feelings swept across her face; incredulity, astonishment, contempt, each shook her visibly. At last she spoke with bitter emphasis.

"How short-sighted we are, Maurice, when all is reckoned up! Only two days ago — two little days ago — I proposed to explain Anna's identity on half a sheet of notepaper." She laughed.

Strode looked back into the room. His silence stung her afresh.

"I see, I overlooked the value you men set upon yourselves; I forgot that the nicest man, the very nicest, grinds up into common clay in one particular mill, the mill of his own conceit."

Strode passed his hand over his hair, then he moved forward and stood looking down on her. "Good God!" he said quietly, "do I seem as big a cad as that?"

She had avoided his eyes, now she looked quickly up. She was not devoid of instinct, and her comprehension was clearer than that of most. With a sharp movement she rose and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Maurice," she said, "I believe I have been a fool all along; I believe I have been taking the wrong turning. A man does n't go down to hell because the girl he loves has a great career!" She searched his face.

He looked at her evenly for a moment, then he looked away.

"No," he said slowly, "that's right. But the fires do lick him up when he sees the woman he cares for suffering through his act; when he faces himself for three hours and realises that the good has been taken out of her life by his folly, his want of sight and sense. Good God! what she has gone through! I feel like a murderer."

Mrs. Maxtead's skin paled a little, her eyes looked preternaturally bright.

"Maurice, if I love a single human being, that being is Anna. Can you be a little lucid in what you say?"

He moved to the side of the couch and sat on its arm; his knees were apart, his locked hands between them; his head was bent.

"Do you mean to tell me that you don't know?" he asked slowly.

She looked up. "I don't know a single thing."

His gaze dropped to the carpet.

"You know of Anna's antecedents — of her past?"

"Yes." She looked up again.

"Well —" He raised his head and met her eyes. "Well, by a very odd chance I knew of them

too — unconnected with her, of course. And that last night at Trescar — "

Her lips paled slightly.

"Yes?" she said. "Yes?"

"That night I told her her own story, by way of a romance — names, places, everything — and all, all of it from the other side, the other point of view. I had got hold of the other end. I suppose every story, like every string, must have two ends — "

He stopped brusquely, and the muscles showed in his clasped hands.

Mrs. Maxtead rose. "Poor child!" she said shortly. "Poor child!"

"Oh, but that was n't all. I laid it on; I saw that the story was picturesque." He laughed. "I harped on the scene she had left — the beggar eating his heart out for her — the poor old father with his reason gone — "

"Maurice!"

"Did n't you know that? The poor old father's brain gave way when she left. I can't say that I wonder much."

"Oh," she said, "I did n't know — I did n't know that." She rose, and crossing to the mantelpiece leant her elbows on it. "And was that all?"

Strode threw back his head.

"It 's probably about half. All night I have been trying to recall things; but the more I harass myself the blanker they get. One thing I 'm sure of, though — "

"And that — ?"

"That I gave my cursed personal opinion pretty freely; that I spoke of her as branded — unfit for honest minds to tolerate. Good God!"

He rose again and walked to the window.

Mrs. Maxtead said nothing. Her head was bent, her arm rested heavily on the mantel-shelf.

There was a ponderous silence. Then at last she looked up.

"Of course you have guessed that this belongs to me — that I was the motive power from the first? That I played on her then — have played on her ever since? In this world, Maurice, the blunt people, like me, work things; the sensitive people, like Anna, pay the price. Does n't it strike you sometimes that the world is out of gear?"

Strode made no reply. He had turned from the window, after a hasty glance into the roadway, and stood again by the couch.

"Maurice, what did strike you when she came on the stage? I have a raging curiosity to know."

For a moment his lips tightened; then unaccountably they relaxed.

"After all, why should n't I?" He raised his head. "Why should n't I tell you? You see, it hangs like this. When a man fixes a prejudice in his mind, he clings to it like grim death. It 's easy and nice to have convictions and make theories about a prejudice, because a prejudice does n't enter into working life. Once reduce it to flesh and blood,

once give it a body and set it in the path a man wants to walk, and it sings very small. All that I said at Trescar that night was absolutely true—at the time. This woman was a prejudice to me—had been for years; a peg to hang my theories on. But to-night—" He stopped and looked down, then looked up again with his old alert glance. "To-night all that died its allotted death. It took a while to straighten things, but not so long as you might have guessed. After all, there was only one fact to be brought home: the fact that the prejudice was Anna—Anna the prejudice; the fact that, right or wrong, past or present, she belongs to me. Anna is Anna. You understand?"

She answered nothing for a moment. Then she came towards him quickly; but in the centre of the room she stopped, her figure stiffened, she made a gesture of silence. At the same instant Strode looked towards the window. From the road outside came the sound of a stopping carriage; almost simultaneously the electric bell whizzed through the house under a lengthy pressure.

Mrs. Maxtead laughed nervously, and moved back to the glass above the mantlepiece.

"What a relief!" she said. "What an unspeakable relief! Do I look very demoralized, Maurice? I always like to seem my best for Anna. Women dress for each other, you know; that's a truism that's quite correct." She talked very fast, without any noticeable pause.

Strode looked a little pale through his sunburn. He crossed to her and touched her arm. "Say," he said, "do you think she 'll understand?"

She laughed again. In the hall they heard the door open.

"My dear man, I would n't mind standing in your shoes — there 's not much doubt as to their fit."

She stopped sharply, and they both turned round.

The curtain was drawn back, and the white light from the hall streamed through into the room. In the aperture stood Branks, his manner correct but apologetic, his face slightly perturbed.

Strode was conscious of a quick undeniable apprehension; the brightness died out of Mrs. Maxtead's eyes.

"Well, Branks?" she said in an even voice.

"Well, ma'am —" Branks's eyes sought the ceiling.

Strode took a step forward. "Out with it, man! Don't stand there gaping."

A purple shade crossed Branks's face. Ignoring Strode, he turned to his mistress.

"As I was about to say, ma'am —"

"Quite right, Branks. Go on."

"Bryan went to the theatre, ma'am, as usual, at a quarter before twelve."

Strode walked the length of the room, and stood by the piano.

"He waited till five minutes past twelve, ma'am, then he sent for the door-keeper."

"Yes, Branks?"

"Well, ma'am, the door-keeper, he said —"

Strode lifted a silver ornament and laid it back with a slight crash.

"Yes, Branks — the door-keeper —?" Mrs. Maxtead's voice was wonderfully still.

With an effort Branks collected his faculties.

"He said, ma'am, that Miss Solny had left the theatre with her maid at twenty minutes before twelve; they drove off in a cab, ma'am, directly Miss Solny left the stage. Bryan wishes to know, ma'am, if you have any orders for him to-night?"

There was a pause. Branks looked discreetly down. Mrs. Maxtead glanced apprehensively at Strode.

"Thanks, Branks; that is all. Tell Bryan he can put up the horses."

Branks silently withdrew.

For an interval neither occupant of the room stirred; by mutual consent they avoided each other's eyes. In the hall outside they caught the muttering of subdued voices, then the shutting of the hall door. A moment later, the sound of horses moving slowly off came to them through the open window.

With an effort, Strode crossed the room and held out his hand. Even in the lamplight his face looked a trifle grey.

She glanced up and touched his hand.

"Where are you going?"

He looked at her abruptly.

"To every hotel within reach to-night; to the docks in the morning. I'll wire the slightest news. Good-night!" He drew away his hand and walked to the door.

"Maurice!"

He turned back.

She was leaning against the mantelpiece. Her eyes gleamed; there was a valiant attempt at irony in the set of her lips, but her arms hung stiffly by her sides.

"If I were the religious sort, Maurice, I should want to say, 'God bless you.' You understand?"

He stood irresolute for a second; then he walked back and took her hand again.

"Yes," he said; "I believe I do understand."

A minute later he was gone.

PART THREE — CHAPTER I

IT was early forenoon, but the light that filtered into the curio shop was so dim that only the white Chinese vases that stood close to the door were clearly discernible; the shelves, rising tier on tier along the walls, and filled for the most part with Eastern cloths, seemed but so many reflections of the gloom; whiffs of hot air came through the overshadowed doorway and mingled with the scent of spice: the whole atmosphere sanded the throat with a dry and enervating warmth.

At the farther end of the shop Johann was attending to a customer; in the scanty light his pinched face was barely to be seen, but as he moved from place to place a stranger's eye would have been caught by the stoop, acquired of late years, that added point and pathos to his deformity. The minutes passed; the customer was testy and hard to please; it was a hot day for bargaining, but Johann was conscientious and buried himself in his task. So absorbed did he become that when a new shadow fell across the doorway, then drifted inward, and a new figure entered the shop, he failed to notice it.

The new-comer entered softly. She was tall, so tall that unconsciously, and without real necessity,

she bent as she passed through the low door; her dress and hat were black and simply made, but with the simplicity of marked distinction. In the first instant she paused, but quickly gathering decision, moved into the shadows on the right-hand side and stood looking slowly round. Her survey was studied and deliberate, but instantly it was completed she let her eyes droop, shivered a little nervously, then pulled off her gloves with peculiar haste.

Seller and customer were engaged in an argument; neither thought of looking round. It was early day, but as yet the sun had not made its tardy way into Felt Street; outside in the close air children played on the cobbles, their cries and laughter and disputes coming sharply audible; inside the spicy smell mingled overpoweringly with the heat, and Johann's high-pitched voice, with its faint foreign intonation, sounded glaringly real.

To the girl standing in the shadows it seemed that the circle of life was complete. From the neutral tints she had passed through every graduating shade that existence can possess, revolving slowly past the faint light tones of hope and expectation to the vivid colours of actual fulfilment; from the vivid colours steadily and inevitably forward, to be confronted once again by greyness and shadow. She put out her hand and tentatively touched the bronze Buddha that still held its place on the second shelf behind the set of ivory chessmen. The dust came off thickly on her finger; she raised her hand in an unconscious

gesture and scanned the marks; then quite swiftly she let her arm drop. The customer's purchase was made.

She heard his last gossiping word, his lingering parting; lastly, his slow movements as he passed her, quietly oblivious of her existence, and disappeared into the street. With the feeling of chill that always assailed her in moments of nervousness, she moved from the shadow and walked slowly into the centre of the shop.

Johann had moved back into the partitioned desk; he saw through the imperfect glass that a new figure had come into the shop; with a slight sigh he pushed back his chair.

"What can I do for you?" he asked gently. His voice was quiet, his face, as he turned it towards her, caught a glint of light from the street, and with a quiver of realisation she saw his features distinctly — the patient eyes, the drooping mouth, the mark of the old scar running from eyebrow to temple.

She laid her hand heavily on the counter.

He looked at her, but without recognition.

She moved a little, and a faint scent of violets was carried to him on the hot air. The silence was strained.

He in his turn shifted his position. "What can I do for you?" he said again.

Her fingers pressed the counter; then quite abruptly she lifted her head.

"One thing, Johann. Forgive me, if it 's not too late."

Johann drew back against the piled-up uniforms that were stacked behind the counter, precisely as other uniforms had been stacked in other days. He covered his face with his hands; then at last he looked up. "Anna!" he said in a blind way. "Anna!" At the repetition of the word his breath failed.

The girl bent forward, leaning across the counter. "Yes," she said hurriedly; "Anna — after all the years, after everything." She suddenly crouched lower, laying her face against the shining wood.

Twice he moved from the pile of uniforms and twice retreated; twice he passed his hand agitatedly across his mouth; then finally grasping his determination, he came forward and touched her shoulder.

"There never was anything to forgive," he said.

Her head remained bent. She was not crying, but a silent agitation, quite incomprehensible to the man, was shaking her almost as tears might have done.

His fingers pressed her arm deprecatingly. "Don't!" he said. "Don't! It's all right, all quite right."

She raised her head and drew herself slowly upright; then her lips opened in silent surprise. Johann's voice, low and uneven though it was, had not prepared her for his altered face. The change was very marked; even in the dimness of the shop

his sudden joy seemed to radiate from him and surround him like a light; the shadow was gone from his eyes, even his shrunken figure had gained new dignity. He carried himself soberly, but with the pride of a believer whose faith has been justified.

He looked at her confidently, as a child might have done; then turned to the desk, opened it and drew out a slate; this he carried back and laid on the counter.

"See!" he said gently. "I always knew — always."

Anna glanced away, then turned again and gazed at him searchingly. "How did you know?"

"How? You wrote it." He pointed to the slate.

Anna turned and walked the length of the shop. There is some faith before which we stand aghast. At the street door she turned again and moved slowly back.

"Johann, there is something I want to say — now, at the very first." The warmth was oppressive; she passed her hand over her forehead. "I 'm not like what you think. I forgot — for whole years I quite forgot; even lately, when I realised, when some one told me of — of him — " She indicated the rooms overhead.

Johann made a step towards her, but she warned him back.

"When somebody told me of him, and I realised, even then — even then, I fought to the last day, till

the very last hour. It was only then, Johann, when every other way was absolutely barred, that I made up my mind. Last night I finished an engagement here in London, and after the play I drove away from the theatre with my maid; we stayed the night in a lodging, and this morning I paid her and let her go. Nobody knows what I've done — nobody — not a single soul." She paused excitedly and clasped her hands behind her. "It's a great comfort to talk, Johann, just to say things to someone; I have been silent for such a long, long time." She passed backwards and forwards across the shop.

Johann's eyes never left her face. "But you are glad to be back? Glad to be home?" His eagerness trembled in his voice.

"Of course! Of course!" She turned to him with sharp unnecessary emphasis; then, fearing to pause on the words, she went on again. "I have done everything for the best, Johann — everything; I have broken faith with no one. I have finished my engagements to the last night; I have paid every bill; I have transferred all my money from my own bank account to Mrs. Maxtead's — all except three hundred pounds that I have spared for him — for him and for you." She glanced upwards again. "Don't you think, Johann, that any one — that even a very, very strict person, with very hard and strict ideas, would say that I have done well? That I have done as well as I could do — now, at the last?" She waited anxiously for his reply.

He gazed at her in faint bewilderment. "Of course you have done well."

She laughed nervously and lifted the edge of her hat where it pressed her hair. "Thanks, Johann! I'm so glad. I've been waiting ages to hear somebody say just those words; they reassure me very much." She leant back against the counter, excitement and fatigue showing in her eyes.

Johann stepped towards her. "You are very tired," he said. "I have never seen any one look so tired. Will you rest? Will you come upstairs? Your own room —" His tone was deprecating. "Your own little room is just as it used to be; I have cleaned it every day —"

For an instant her face paled and she turned away; then she mastered herself. "Thanks, Johann! I will see my room. But first, don't you think —?" Once more her eyes sought the ceiling.

He half extended his hand. "Oh no," he said, "not now — not just now; you are too tired —"

She met his gaze excitedly. "Yes, Johann, now — now, this minute; I want everything in one rush; I want to know the worst — all the very worst. I have quite, quite, quite finished with suspense; I have burnt all my stupid boats; I shall never make dreams about things any more — never any more —" Her voice rose, fell, then half broke.

Johann's smile faded again to perplexity; he moved from one foot to the other, then once more he touched her arm.

"But you are glad to be back? You are glad to be home?"

She steadied herself and looked at him. "This is the only place in the world, Johann, that has room for me; please believe that. Now we 'll go upstairs."

PART THREE—CHAPTER 11

THE stairs, with their steep unevenness, had always appeared narrow ; to Anna, after a lapse of eight years, they seemed dwarfed. As she mounted slowly, her right shoulder brushed the bare dark wall, while with every slight movement her left arm touched the shaky bannister. She followed Johann steadily, her lips set, her head held very high ; the same suppressed force that had possessed her for four weeks was discernible in every gesture, almost in every breath. A very close observer might have trembled for the inevitable collapse.

The woodwork strained and creaked ; a frill of her skirt caught on a nail and tore. Johann paused and bent, but she anticipated him, and, stooping, wrenched off the strip of silk. Then the ascent went on.

On the landing there was more light ; and on the landing for the first time her courage quailed. She put out her hand and pulled Johann's sleeve.

"Johann, what does he look like?" She leant back for a second against the wall.

He raised his eyes. "Not terrible at all — very old and very thin ; nothing more."

She drew in her breath slowly, her face showed pale against the blackness of the wall. "Will he know me, do you think?"

There was a silence.

"You are changed." Johann spoke with hesitation.

She passed her hand over her eyes, then looked up. "I suppose I am; it was right to remind me. Go into the room first. I'll stand outside and see him without his seeing me; afterwards I'll decide what's best to do. Now, Johann, please—" She lifted her hat again with the same nervous gesture, as if it weighed upon her; and Johann crossed the corridor.

Round old Solny's door the shadows fell again thickly. As Johann touched the handle Anna caught his arm.

"Wait!" she said.

He paused obedient.

She moved back towards the head of the stairs, then retraced her steps; her movements were uneven and indirect. "It's a terrible moment, Johann."

Johann moved from one foot to the other.

She leant back once more against the wall and closed her eyes; at last she straightened herself.

"Now, Johann, please—" Her voice was like an echo of itself.

There was a moment of suspense, then the door swung open with a creak. Johann moved slowly forward, and Anna, with a feeling of dizzy weakness, leant against the lintel on the darker side.

The room corresponded in size to the parlour downstairs; and the sun that in the morning fell full on the back of the house, was streaming through the low open window, causing the motes to dance in its shafts. The carpetless floor was very clean; the piles of books and odd-shaped boxes stored on window-seat and floor were arranged with an eye to order; and the high bed with its one upright occupant, was in itself an evidence of care. With an unconscious thrill Anna acknowledged the patient pathetic duty it all portrayed; then her senses merged to one interest; clasping her hands, she leant forward in absolute quiet.

In the narrow bed, sitting stiffly up, and supported by a bolster bent in two, sat old Solny. In the bright sunlight his face had a yellow tinge; the hollowness of his cheeks and the bones in his hands were startlingly noticeable; across his knees, from side to side of the bed, ran a deal board forming a ledge, and raised upon this to a tolerable height was a card-house, erected with infinite care. As the door opened he placed the last card — a much-thumbed ace — and without looking up raised his hand warningly.

Johann tiptoed across the room and stood beside the bed; very slowly Solny raised his head and smiled in a vacant way.

"Zenia has gone out," he said, alluding to the wife who had been dead for more than twenty years. "Zenia has gone out and has left the

little one to me." He indicated the other side of the bed. "We have been amusing each other; I have built her a house of cards. Be careful, Johann! A house of cards is easily upset."

Anna's fingers dropped apart.

Johann passed his hand across his face and looked furtively towards the door. "The day is fine, master. Will you get up and sit by the window?"

Solny eyed him meditatively. "Perhaps," he said. "Perhaps — when Zenia returns. Till then I will stay like this. I am tired — and beside, it is easier to amuse the little one from here. There is too much sun in the window; it makes me want to sleep, and that would never do. Would it, little one?" He put out his arm with a pitifully gentle motion and appeared to touch something — a head or a hand visible to him alone.

"She grows, Johann, eh?"

Johann shuffled with his feet.

"She grows? She will be tall — as tall as her mother, but never so beautiful."

"She will be very tall, master."

"So!" Solny nodded once or twice and quietly altered the top storey of his card-house. From long practice he had brought the feat of balancing to much perfection; though of late there were moments when even the pasteboard squares seemed too heavy for his emaciated hands, and he was forced to rest many times before even the simplest structure was complete.

Anna's heart contracted as she watched. The wofully thin wrists, the aged face from which all the old querulousness had departed, cut deeper and surer than any spoken reproach.

Arranging the cards with slow deliberation, he began to talk again, raising his eyes from time to time to his listener's face.

"A child is a responsibility, Johann. We often talk of that — Zenia and I. We see her here a baby — able to smile and eat and cry, and no more; and yet, Johann, one day — one day not so very far away —" His interest flagged; his voice faltered; then he looked up freshly, his unbalanced mind swinging to a fresh point.

"The country?" he said suddenly. "How does the country look to-day? I see so little from my window — just the black tree-trunks of the verandah, and beyond, the purple and crimson of the plums and the cherries, and I want more, Johann, I want to see more." He took up a card, straightened it and laid it in place. "I want to see the land curve up and down. I want to see the maples in full leaf and the steppe grass swinging in the wind till the star-thistles show. That's what I want, Johann — that's what makes the blood flow." He smiled again uncertainly; then a still newer expression flitted over his eyes.

"The window-shutters?" he said. "Are the window-shutters in repair, should a storm break?"

Anna put her hand to her throat. The still air

seemed to stagnate. She felt enmeshed in an overpowering dream.

"Have you seen to the window-shutters, Johann?"

Johann turned away. "Not yet, master — not as yet. Later, if you wish —"

Solny raised his hand gently. "You must never neglect your duty, Johann. Duty is the great precept. We must set an example to the little Anna — we three; soon she will be big enough to understand. Eh, little one?" He extended his hand afresh, and his vague eyes suddenly filled with tears. "She is the little sunbeam, Johann, eh? Even in the long winter she will make a light?"

Johann said nothing. From the shadows in the passage came a rustling stir.

"What is that? Is that Zenia?" Solny started up, and the card-house fell; then he sank weakly back.

Johann laid his hand soothingly on the coverlet. "It is nothing, master — nothing — the cat after a mouse." His words were disjointed. In great trepidation he walked across the room. As he stepped hurriedly on to the landing and drew the door to, Solny's voice came again, wavering and plaintive.

"Johann, I want Zenia. I want my wife."

PART THREE—CHAPTER III

IN the corridor Anna caught Johann's arm and drew him to the head of the rickety stairs. There she released him, and stood leaning against the bannister. Her face was without colour and her eyes looked dark. It was a moment before she spoke; then her voice sounded distant and subdued.

"Johann," she said, "he is dying. I know it perfectly well. I have never seen death, but I know it — I can feel it. His face is like a lamp with the wick dying down. It 's terrible! Terrible!"

Johann's face paled. "I see no change," he stammered. "He has looked like that for months and months. He is a little thinner, perhaps — a little weaker, but it is nothing to count."

Anna threw up her head.

"That 's it! That 's it! You see him every day; you don't mark the little changes — the little signs. Why did nobody tell me? Why did nobody send for me? It was n't right; it was n't kind." She swayed a little to and fro.

Johann stood in an agony of perplexity. "It is because of his mind," he urged at last; "because of the difference between what he thinks and what he

looks. He believes himself a young man, married a few years, still in his home in Russia. It is because of the difference — the strangeness of the difference — that you see him as you do. Anna, believe me — " He used her name in perturbed haste.

She made an excited gesture. " I see just the truth — just the plain terrible truth. I must go to him at once."

Johann started forward, putting out his hand. " But the shock to him and to you," he said. " You are so changed." He looked at her with swift, mute admiration. " You are so — so very changed."

She pushed past him. " He must know me, Johann. He is my father."

" But your dress — your face ? "

" My dress ! My dress is black — he will see nothing beyond that. As for my face, I can take off my hat — it is my hat that makes the difference." With shaking fingers she drew out her hat-pins.

Johann cleared his throat. " But if he does n't know you ? "

" He must know me."

" But if he does n't ? "

" Well ? " She threw her hat aside.

" You won't — ? It won't — ? " In his fear and anxiety for her he drew nearer by a step.

She had moved on into the shadows, but she turned shortly. " Oh, I 'm not thinking of myself," she said.

There was a moment of strung suspense ; then she moved forward and the door of the bedroom creaked.

For an appreciable time Johann and Anna stood side by side in the open doorway. For an instant Johann shut his eyes, but for an instant only. The fear of seeing was outweighed by the fear of not seeing. He raised his lids gradually, and stood with suspended breath.

The light from the early day encircled the whole room. There were no shadows, no dark corners suggestive of suspense. To the dimmest eye all that there was to see was seen at once — sharp, uncompromising, and plain.

Anna stood for an instant longer. Her head was at its highest, her resolution strained almost to defiance. Once Johann heard her gasp; then, with great rapidity, she moved straight forward and paused silently at the foot of the bed.

The wait that followed was momentous. Solny raised himself, staring with dim eyes. The silence was dead in its intensity. The remaining cards slid one after the other from the coverlet to the floor — each one dropping with the sound of rain on a zinc roof. Johann moistened his lips and looked towards Anna. She was still rigid, her eyes on her father's eyes.

Solny raised himself further: his worn face had a greenish hue; his limbs shook; in his glance there was question — question and nothing more.

Anna's lips formed themselves to speak; but all at once, as ice might break, a light showed in the old man's face: it flared for a second, then the ter-

rible vague solemnity of the features suddenly relaxed. With a broken sound that was neither cry nor entreaty, and yet partook of both, he held out his arms.

"Zenia!" he said; "my wife!"

Johann's feelings burst from him in an inarticulate word. Anna made no sound.

Solny's voice rose again. "My wife!" he said. "Zenia!" His speech had a new ring: it carried and vibrated with an inflection that neither listener had heard before.

Still in silence Anna moved forward. Her face was drawn, but she moved on; her steps dragged, but never faltered; slowly she passed round the bed.

Johann, by the door, felt a lump rise in his throat.

Solny still held out his arms, the new light illumining his face. "My wife!" he said again.

There was a faint interval — a faint hesitation, as if all existence hung in wait. Above the bed a fly whizzed in a cobweb; through the window came the hum of distant voices, the sound of carts on the cobbles of Enbury Street. Anna hung back, swayed forward, then was caught in her father's arms.

No one spoke, for there was no room for speech; but very quietly, almost reverently, Johann withdrew, closing the door.

At the same moment, sharp and imperative, the shop bell rang through the house.

PART THREE—CHAPTER IV

JOHANN descended the stairs slowly. Tense and vividly surprising as the scene upstairs had been, his mind, once beyond its atmosphere, was speedily engrossed by other thoughts. The strange possibilities opened up by Solny's hallucination seemed to his simple mind to be in some sense predestined — a curious compensating arrangement planned from the first by Fate, to be left with all confidence in Fate's hands. To him personally one fact — one pressing fact — rose above all life, dominating it — the fact that Anna had returned. As a child, he had loved her with the vague speculative adoration of a romantic mind; as a mythical being removed from him by the world and yet belonging to his life, he had worshipped her as a saint; now for the first time he saw her as a woman, and his brain swam. She was his to shelter and slave for and wait upon — his to hold against all the world. His love welled up, brimming, overflowing. For the first time in years his eyes looked on life from a personal standpoint. His blood quickened, and he straightened himself, casting off the stoop that a decade of disappointment and self-effacement had added to his deformity. But at the door leading

into the shop he halted, and subdued his expression; his triumph was too new an acquisition to be shared.

In the shop a man was standing with his back to the counter; even in the imperfect light his figure showed erect and tall. As Johann entered he started forward, and in three steps reached his side.

Johann looked up, his face lighting with surprise. "Good-day, sir," he said in a carefully subdued voice.

"Good-day." Strode's voice was level and concise.

"You are back in town, sir?" Johann strove to seem usual. At sight of a friend his triumph beat up afresh, so strong and assertive that he almost feared it; but the danger passed. His was not a chance fact to be flung at the head of even a friend; it was a precious truth, to be treasured secretly and doled out carefully when the time came. He longed inordinately to hear Strode's steady voice quicken with surprise and congratulation; but meanwhile the hidden knowledge was very sweet.

"You are back in town, sir?" he said again.

Strode was silent. Together they moved to the counter, and Johann passed inside. The younger man walked a step or two into the shop, then turned sharply. He came back to his former place; but this time he faced the counter, and leaning forward, placed his elbows on it. His face looked older by several degrees than it had done the night before; his skin still gave the curious impression of pallor under tan; but his eyes had never been more clear.

"Look here," he said at last; "I have n't come to talk. I 've come to tell you something and ask you something; and there 's one fact I want you to keep in mind; that first to last I 'm treating you level — treating you man to man." He took off his hat and laid it on the counter; his manner was very quiet.

Johann was puzzled; he even felt a momentary compunction at his own irrepressible happiness. He leant back against the glass of the desk, the shadows of the woodwork falling heavily about his face. "It would be strange if I thought differently, sir," he said; "you have always been like that."

Strode's eyes tried to pierce the gloom. "I 'm glad you think so. It makes it easier for me to start." He moved slightly, but the expression of his face did not change. "It 's about your master's daughter."

A shock of feeling ran through Johann, raising wild echoes, touching unguessed depths. He passed his hand carefully across his mouth.

"The master's daughter!" He was no actor; but love and the instinct of self can make a man anything. All his new emotions leaped in surprise and fear; he drew farther back into the dusk.

Strode watched him eagerly, but the light was impossible. "Some men," he said at length, "would feel justified in coming here and springing a question on you; in another circumstance I 'd probably feel justified myself, but not in this. I 've always felt that Fate has played you a good many shabby tricks,

and somehow — somehow I 'd rather not copy Fate." He stopped and smoothed his hair.

Johann waited in fascinated quiet.

"To come to the point, things stand like this. Some time ago I met your master's daughter, where or how does n't signify; anyhow, I admired her — she liked me — and we became friends." For the first time Strode spoke fast. "For some weeks she has been acting here in town at the 'Corinthian' Theatre. Last night she finished her engagement, and last night, after the play was over, she did n't come home as usual to the house where she was staying — she disappeared, you understand." He leant forward and scanned the other's face; his manner was very still, but the muscles showed in his hands as they had done the night before.

Johann never stirred.

Strode's glance concentrated. "Say something!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Don't hang back like that. Have n't you anything to say?"

Johann gathered his ideas with difficulty. "What am I to say, sir? For us she disappeared eight years ago."

Strode raised himself: he seemed to find his next sentence difficult. He began it twice, each time in a different form; then breaking off short, he started for the third time, and very fast.

"Perhaps I 've not made matters clear enough." Again he passed his hand across his hair. "We — Mrs. Maxtead and her other friends — we are

anxious — we are desperately anxious — " For the first time he stressed his words, for the first time the raging eagerness beneath showed through his calm.

Johann's lips closed slowly ; he glanced apprehensively at the parlour door. " Why are her friends so very anxious ? " was all he said.

Strode straightened his shoulders. " Because for weeks she has been in great trouble — great mental trouble. Can't you grasp what I 'm driving at ? " He suddenly lifted his head. " A woman like that does n't take such a step without very goading reasons. With such a woman very goading reasons might drive to — to anything." He stopped.

Johann's mind was working hard. Suspense is an unyielding power. " Once," he said shrewdly, " you did n't speak so of the master's daughter ; once you were bitter when you spoke of her."

Strode made an impatient sound. " Once ! " he said. " Oh, it 's easy to have been bitter — once." He moved again into the middle of the shop.

" And now — ? " For the universe Johann could not have restrained the words.

" Now — I love her."

Johann turned rigid ; the voice sank through his consciousness like running lead.

Strode wheeled back to the counter and to his former place. He glanced as before at his companion's face ; but either the surge of individual feeling dulled his gaze, or Johann was more inscrutable than ever, for he observed nothing.

"That 's what I call being straight with you," he said. "There 's no need to tell you that I love her, but I want to; it seems more fair. She sort of belonged here, and you 've a claim to know. I love her in the right way — in the way that holds. I 've loved her since I saw her first."

Johann moistened his lips. "And she? Does she love you?"

Strode looked towards the street. "That," he said quietly, "we won't discuss. We 'll let it stand that I love her."

"We all do that," said Johann fiercely.

Strode looked slowly back. "I expect you 're about right," he said.

For a moment he stayed silent, his hands on the counter, but only for a moment. With a sharp upward glance he began to speak again.

"Now that I 've been square, I 'll come to the point. Is she here?"

There was a pause, but a pause no bigger than a breathing space. Johann looked down, then looked up; all through his body his nerves twitched. His eyes rose slowly, and slowly rested on his companion's face. In the uncertain light Strode's features showed finely cut and strong. His grey eyes were alert; about his mouth anxiety and courage had set new and firmer lines; in every detail the contrast between the two men was cruel and sharp. Johann looked long and steadily, the contrast sinking into his mind very deep; then, like a river long retarded

or a wind suddenly loosed, all his love so repressed, so stored up, broke upon him in a flood. For the first time he understood jealousy in all its ungovernable force. He looked his questioner up and down, then he answered steadily enough.

"I have not seen the master's daughter for eight years."

Strode paled noticeably, then rallied his courage. "Then she has written," he said confidently. "She must have written. Speak out, man! Don't keep me in suspense."

Johann's eyes dropped. "No, sir; she has not written."

Strode walked to the shop door, then back again.

"You're treating me straight? As straight as I treated you?"

Johann nodded.

Strode passed his hand once again over his hair; for the moment he felt at bay. "I'm not calling you a liar," he said at last; "but there are times when a man doubts even himself. Will you swear to me, God's truth, that what you've said is true?"

Johann returned his glance. "God's truth!" he said, and his tongue clicked against the roof of his mouth.

For an interval neither spoke. The elder moved uneasily from foot to foot; the younger stood quite still. At last the latter drew out a card, wrote on it, and laid it on the counter.

"I've left my club," he said; "I'll be at these

rooms indefinitely. Come to me at any time — any hour. Sooner or later she must come here; I'm certain of that."

He picked up his hat, turned abruptly, and walked to the door. Under the low arch he stopped and looked back.

"Look here," he said, "you know what a shred of news would have meant to you — eight years ago."

Johann answered nothing; but nodding slowly, he picked up the card.

PART THREE — CHAPTER V

WHEN Strode left the shop, Johann wiped his forehead, breathed deeply, and, leaning back against the partition of the desk, stood for a long time in perfect quiet. The stifling heat of the day, made more oppressive in the narrow street, insured him against further customers; he had nothing beyond his own disturbed thoughts to harass his mind. Once only he changed his position, and then it was to hide Strode's card in an inner pocket. Having done this, he returned to his huddled attitude, gazing with blank eyes at the space of counter with its shining wood.

After half an hour of sultry quiet there was a sound in the parlour; with a jerk he started upright, a dull red passing over his face and dying slowly out. When the door opened, and Anna came into the shop, he had regained his usual look of suppressed quiet.

Her face was still pale, though not with the marred pallor of tears; her hair was ruffled, and her eyelids looked heavy and dark. Without a word she came across the dividing space and sat down on an old leather trunk.

"He is asleep now," she said; "but he looks so thin — so terribly thin. I was afraid to watch him any more."

Johann took a frayed cushion from a shelf and shook off the dust.

"All old people look like that when they are asleep." He came round the counter. "Sit on this; it will be more comfortable."

She took the cushion, but made no effort to rise.

"Do they, Johann — always?"

"Always."

She sighed, only half satisfied, and the anxious look lingered in her eyes. At last she glanced up.

"Is n't it like the irony of life, to come back too late? Is n't it dealing out retribution to an inch, that I, who forgot my father, should be forgotten by him?"

Johann touched her shoulder hastily. "Be patient," he said; "be patient a little. To-morrow — in a few days — he will know you."

She shook her head. "No, he will never know me — never — never. I feel it through and through. I know it." She clasped her hands.

Johann's lips tightened apprehensively. "But you are glad to be back? You are glad to be home?" He searched her face.

"Of course, Johann; of course." She put out her hand and half touched his; then she suddenly rose,

and walking across the shop, stood by the opposite shelves.

Johann's eyes devoured her.

Presently, with her face averted, she spoke again. "Johann," she said, "I have been missed by now; my friends must be looking for me. Some of them" — she stopped for an instant — "just a very few of them know of this place; and it's possible — not very likely, but possible — that some of them — one of them may come here." She spoke very fast.

Johann felt his breath catch. "You mean the woman who took you away?"

She coloured suddenly. "I mean — any one."

There was an uneasy wait; then she looked up. "Should they come, Johann — should any one come, you will tell me at once?"

The heat in the shop was excessive; Johann wiped his forehead afresh. "Yes, I will tell you."

His tone struck her; she moved a little towards him. "No one has come? No one has come while I have been upstairs?"

"No." He felt his tongue rasp as it had done when Strode put him on his oath, but his voice came steadily enough.

"You are sure? Quite sure?"

He moved uncertainly, deprecation and pain passing over his face.

Misreading his glance, she moved towards him with swift compunction. "Johann, forgive me; please forgive me. I didn't mean to doubt."

There was a fresh pause. Johann picked up the cushion from where it had fallen and placed it on the trunk. Anna sat down again wearily, resting against the counter.

"It is so hot," she said, "and my head aches; I had no sleep last night."

He watched her jealously as she leant back with shut eyes. "Will you eat?" he suggested nervously.

She shook her head.

"Will you drink some tea? You used to like the tea." In his eagerness his fingers twitched.

She lifted her lids; for the first time since her arrival she smiled, though the smile was very shadowy and weak.

Johann's heart bounded, and his face flushed. "Will you, please?"

She looked slowly up. "It sounds nice," she said. "I thought I should never want to eat again; but a real Russian cup of tea."

He came forward; his eyes almost shone. In his face deference and adoration, awe and eagerness, all strove for place. "It will only be one moment," he said; "one moment and no more. The kettle always waits."

She tried to smile again, but with small success. "You must n't spoil me, Johann."

His face glowed. He moved laggingly towards the parlour door, and with his hand on the curtain, paused.

"And you are glad to be home?" The question was irrepressible, it had sunk into his brain; in an hour it had become the key-stone of his being, the symbol of hope and of apprehension, of perfect joy and complete fear. He asked it with his soul in his voice.

It struck to Anna's heart with a chill. She shivered slightly in the heat of the shop; the heavy spicy smell, the breathless atmosphere, the cramped musty house, all crushed her tangibly. A sharp terror of the future assailed her; a horrible sense of captivity. She rose again.

"Johann," she said, "don't ask me any more; I'm not capable of answering — not capable of understanding even, just now. I'm like a clock that's wound up to its highest pitch: sometime I may run down, but now I'm strung up — wound up, and everything I do corresponds to that." She stood by the counter, where Strode had stood, looking fixedly before her.

"Some time ago, Johann, I saw myself for the first time, as I really am — selfish, thoughtless, hateful."

He moved forward in dismay, but she motioned him back.

"No; let me go on. I saw myself masquerading in unfair success — a fraud that people would despise if they really understood — a fraud tolerated through ignorance. I saw that the world had no real place for me, so I left the world; I felt that my duty

was here, so I came here. As yet, I 'm glad of nothing and I regret nothing — I feel nothing. I 'm like the miracle-worker waiting for a sign." She tried to laugh.

Johann caught at her last words. "Waiting?" he said. "Waiting for what?"

She looked towards the outer door. "Nothing," she said.

The suspicious spark gleamed again in his eyes. "It is impossible to wait for nothing."

She glanced back at him. "There you are quite wrong, Johann; half the women in the world wait for it till they die."

Johann, still unsatisfied, lingered by the curtain. "If there was something I could do for you — "

She looked at him kindly. "There are two things, Johann. Ask me no questions and give me plenty of work. Those two kindnesses have kept many people sane."

Johann eyed her in troubled silence. Then after an interval, still troubled and still silent, he withdrew.

She dropped into her former seat and took her face between her hands.

PART THREE—CHAPTER VI

IT was a full week later, and again the sun was streaming into Solny's room. The furniture was unchanged, but the room itself had been brightened with flowers: pots of roses in full bloom stood on the dressing-table and on the little table by the bed, and there were lilies on the window-seat. The sweet strong scent, mingling with the sun from the open window, gave a strange effect of fragrance in the dingy place.

Anna knelt at the head of the bed, her arm round her father's neck. It was the attitude that pleased him best and gave most ease to his shaken mind; and for hours of each day, since the morning of her return, she had been content to stay patiently and almost silently in the cramped position — her attitude unchanging, her eyes on the opposite wall.

To-day he was more still than usual. Some minutes before, the doctor, called in by Anna on her first day, had made his visit; and then, for an appreciable space, he had brightened, suffering the superficial examination without demur; but almost at once he had fallen back into his lethargy of calm, his hand resting contentedly in the girl's, his eyes closed.

The incident was a mere mark in the passage of events; for day by day he weakened, day by day he sank a little, grew a degree more childish, a degree easier of management. Sometimes Anna caught herself wishing that the task of nursing was harder, that more self-sacrifice, more active self-effacement were asked of her; but the silent decline went on without a pause — scarcely discernible to the most watchful eye, but all the more unmerciful in its certain steps.

One day he would take his scanty portion of food less well than the day before. Anna would look at Johann, and Johann would answer the look before it could spring to words. "The appetite is always uncertain," he would say, "even in the young — how much more in the old!" And Anna would smile a little, half-heartedly reassured.

Next day the patient would sleep more heavily than usual, and for hours at a time, being roused with difficulty to take his nourishment; and Anna, the only other occupant of the silent room, would suddenly feel her courage fail, suddenly be seized with a great dread of the gaunt figure with its emaciated hands and thin eyelids through which the veins showed, and rushing to the stairs would call repeatedly for Johann. Sometimes Johann was in the kitchen and would hear. Then, stumbling in his eagerness, he would come up the narrow stairs two steps at once, and the girl, suddenly confident in the presence of another, would lose patience with herself

for her want of strength. But at other times, when Johann was busy in the shop, her voice would fail to reach him; and pale at the isolation of this house packed between a hundred other houses, she would return to the room chilled with nervous apprehension, feel her father's pulse, listen to his scarcely audible breathing, then walk to the window and rest her forehead against the glass.

It was a small maze of life, small as the cobweb of the big spider above the bed; and she moved in its narrow round with as little variation, as little knowledge of the morrow, as did the insect itself. In that fact lay at once her danger and her anchorage. One point she had set before her mind, and to one point she held. She would not look ahead. She had blinded herself — or believed that she had blinded herself — to the fact that for her, possessing youth and health, life must go on indefinitely, whatever its mental aspect. She had made her sacrifice and, as she had said, she was like the miracle-worker waiting for a sign. She waited for the sign in rigid patience, but that she did wait and did hope inordinately was shown beyond doubt by the wild beating of her heart each time the shop-bell rang, the quick red that sprang to her face each time that Johann returned from seeing a customer. To hope against hope is the reprieve of humanity; when hope goes the sentence of death is already passed.

In the still room life stagnated. Through the open window the dusty air swung in haltingly. Once

a butterfly flitted to the sill, hovered above the lilies, then slanted out again; in a corner the cat crouched on the boards, stealthily watchful of a mouse-hole; on the table by the bed a fly crawled up the medicine bottle. Anna watched each in turn with weary eyes. Her head ached, her arm was cramped; from her place by the bed she could smell the white roses. By closing her eyes she could see Trescar, the green cliff, the sweep of sea, the tower of Strode's house. But she did not close them; there are some pictures we dare not look upon.

Presently there was a step outside; her figure became alert, a light came into her face. After a faint pause the door creaked cautiously, and Johann came softly into the room.

Solny lifted his lids, glanced at the new-comer, then turned to Anna.

"Dear one!" he said weakly. "Dear one!" He tried to pat her hand, but before the action was completed his eyes had drooped again.

Anna looked up. "Well?" she asked. "What did the doctor say?"

Johann came softly round to her side and sat on the window-ledge.

"As usual — nothing."

She made an impatient sound. "He irritates me," she said. "It's always the same, the very same — 'Be gentle with him, humour him in everything; make him take all the nourishment you can.' Oh, Johann, can't we do more than be gentle

with him? It seems so little, when one would do so much." She spoke in a whisper, but the crampedness, mental and physical, that hemmed her round was observable in her voice.

Johann hung his head.

There was silence in the room for a minute, then Anna spoke again.

"Has any one come to-day, Johann? Any one?" She thrilled with the question, and stayed breathless for the reply.

He moved abruptly and buried his face in the lilies. "No one." His voice was muffled in the flowers. Then came a fresh silence. He stirred his feet uneasily, looking furtively and hungrily at the girl by his side.

Through the window the air fanned in and out; Solny's breathing had grown faintly regular. Quietly but involuntarily Anna drew away her arm, and rising walked to the door.

Johann half rose.

At the door she spoke without looking back. "Stay with him a little, Johann; I 'm going to my own room."

He paused, instantly obedient. His face in the last week had returned to its old drawn pallor; the first radiance of joy, faded by Strode's coming, had never been given renewed life; in its place a desperate desire to hold Anna at all costs, and at all costs to make her satisfied to stay, possessed him to inordinate degrees. He rose in the morning and lay

down at night a prey to the one idea. Every hour of the long monotonous day was an effort to that end, or a sickening fear that the effort had been futile.

Anna, unconscious of all this, unconscious of everything except her own dull despair and her own tired thoughts, moved towards the door-handle. Johann, with a forward start, reached it first and turned it for her. As she passed him he leant near, looking into her face.

"Anna?"

She paused questioningly.

"I have been silent for a week. May I ask something now?" The entreaty, mingling with fear, that showed in his eyes thrust her suddenly back eight years.

"What is it, Johann?" she said gently.

His eyes scorched her face, then fell. "You are contented here? You have no wish to go back?"

His tone was intense; and intensity, when it does not freeze, is infectious. It touched Anna with momentary fire; for a fraction of time the impulse to speak overwhelmed her, the desire to unburden all her mind without counting the consequence became a power almost outside control. Then suddenly Solny stirred.

"Zenia!" he called, with the plaintive wail of a child. "Zenia!"

The effect on the girl was curious. Her lips drew

together in chilled silence; the hand she had half raised dropped back to her side.

"No, Johann, I regret nothing — please believe that." Turning, she walked back to the bed and knelt down again.

PART THREE--CHAPTER VII

MRS. MAXTEAD was in her study; her desk was piled with unanswered letters and her ash-tray with half-burnt cigarettes; there was an air of carelessness in the assortment of her papers, usually so methodical and complete. She sat in deep dejection, her elbows on the desk, her face between her hands.

After five minutes there was a knock on the outer door. She started to her feet and walked across the room; as she reached the door it opened and Strode came in.

She held out her hand in undisguised relief. "How I've been longing for you, Maurice! Is there any news?"

Strode's face looked tired.

"None," he said.

"None?"

He shook his head.

She returned to her seat and motioned him to another. For a while there was silence in the room.

"You've been there — to Felt Street?"

"At eleven."

"Nothing to be learnt?"

"Nothing."

"And that makes the tenth time?"

"Ninth or tenth. One rather loses count." For the first time the reliant confidence of Strode's voice lacked its ring. When he had finished he sat silent, gazing in front of him.

Several minutes passed. Mrs. Maxtead changed her position once or twice, lighted a cigarette and laid it aside unsmoked; at last with a hasty impulse of resolution she rose and crossed to his side, motioning him not to rise.

"This man's answer has always been the same, Maurice? Always unsatisfactory? Always wrung from him, as it were, against his will?"

Strode nodded. "He's a queer chap," he said. "It's his way of telling one bad news, nothing beyond that."

For a space his companion said nothing; then, with quick restlessness, she laid her hand on his arm.

"Maurice, it's my firm impression that the man is lying — that she is there."

Strode started, then relapsed into quiet. "Absurd!" he said.

Her eyes gleamed. "You are a man," she said, "and of course you say 'absurd' to any opinion a woman may advance — it's hereditary, and I forgive you. But I hold to the impression. The creature cares for her, always has cared for her. What is more natural than that, having got her back, he should stick to her? Stick to her like grim death, as you would say, and consider you his worst enemy?"

Strode removed her detaining hand gently, and rose. "Absurd!" he said again. "The man has too few friends to mistake them for anything else. Beside, I put him on his oath the first time I went there. I suppose I may smoke?"

She nodded impatiently, and he lit a cigarette. For a moment it seemed that a wall of reserve was to rise between the two who for days had worked as incessant allies. Continual disappointment has a dangerously blighting consequence.

Mrs. Maxtead walked to her desk and took up her old position, but she watched Strode as he paced the room, smoking hard; she saw him throw away one used-out cigarette and light another; then, with the silent swiftness that characterised her in critical times, she rose once more and went straight up to him. Her eyes were bright, her face had lost its satirical hardness.

"Maurice," she said with direct quiet, "we have been working together for a time that seems like years. In war, when men fight together day after day they must see each other in a new light; a lot must show up, weakness and strength. In the last week I have seen you through and through. I have said nothing, I have taken it all in the day's work, but far down inside my mind I have been shamed into admiration by your sheer pluck — I, who never admire."

Strode touched her hand and laughed.

"No," she said. "No, Maurice, that 's just what I won't have. You think that I don't see, but I do;

you think that I have a little courage of my own, but I have n't, not a scrap. If I have n't let the fear that 's making me frantic show straight out, it is because I am held back by you. When I lie awake at night and think and think of what may have happened — of the horrible thing one dares not frame — what is it that keeps me from getting up and going right out of the house? Nothing but the fact that you, who are bearing so much more, are bearing it so well. My dear boy, I understand quite well — quite well — " She looked at him steadily. " Don't shut me out now, because things are getting too hard."

Strode turned to her for an instant, then walked to the window. He stood in silence for a while, then suddenly he wheeled about.

" You are right ! " he said sharply. " You are quite right ! I do feel driven — driven against a dead wall. I sometimes find myself asking how long it can go on — how long *I* can go on — "

" Don't ! " she said hastily. " These things are best not put into words. When you face a dead wall, turn and try a fresh road."

He laughed again harshly. " Show me the road I have n't tried ? "

She moved towards him once more, in her manner there was an underlying excitement.

" Yes, Maurice, I will."

He glanced at her sharply, but she went on without heeding his regard.

" I have my theory," she said, " about this curio

shop and this deformed friend of yours, and I want to put my theory to the test. You have interviewed him nine times, and each time, as you admit, you have gained nothing. Let me interview him once?" She paused, fingering her rings.

Strode was silent.

"Maurice, let me go there once? All along you have said 'Leave everything to me,' and I have left everything to you. Day after day I 've sat at home, now I feel I 've sat at home long enough." She looked up with eager eyes. "You are as straight as a die yourself; we are all apt to take people's length by our own special measure." There was query and suggestion in her pause.

Strode moved impatiently. "Look here," he said, "it comes to this — I take this beggar to be a liar or I take him to be the reverse; till he is proved to be a liar, I prefer to think him square — in fact I have no choice but to think him square."

"My dear Maurice, there is n't room for truth and jealousy in the same house, you may take my word for that."

"Jealousy?" He stared, then laughed impatiently. "Absurd!" he said once more. "I put him on his oath, you can't get away from that. An oath 's an oath any day to a man like that."

"Not when a woman is in the scales, and the oath can turn it."

Strode turned back to the window. "Absurd! The man 's honest, I 'm certain of it." He spoke decisively, over-decisively it almost seemed.

His companion saw the point.

"Let me have one interview? One interview of half an hour?"

"Where's the good?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Is n't that for me to arrange?"

Strode turned to her abruptly. "Where's the good?" he said again. "You 'll ask what I have asked, you 'll get the same answers, then you 'll come away."

"Pardon, Maurice, then I 'll begin."

He looked down. "You can't legally search the house," he said.

She raised her eyes to his face. "I was n't thinking of searching the house. I know a fact concerning your friend. I have known it for years. It struck me yesterday that a fact is never too stale to be used."

Strode stared at her. "That affair of the jewels?" he said. "You don't mean that old affair you told me of?"

"That is what I mean. As a lever, jewels are as good a weapon as any other."

He still looked at her. "You could n't," he said. "You could n't, after all this time."

"I could do anything, Maurice, and something must be done. Can you guarantee to find her?" The question was sharp.

Strode looked down again. "No," he said very slowly. "No, I suppose I can't."

His companion's eyes flashed. "Then abdicate," she said. "Be generous and abdicate."

He stood very still. "Give me one other day?" he said at last. "It 's a big thing to tell a man he 's perjured himself. Give me one other day?"

She glanced at him swiftly. "You 've thought of another way," she said. "I see it in your eyes."

"Nothing. Just a chance — the shred of a chance" — he still looked on the ground; still seemed harassed and perturbed. "He knows that I love Anna; but I 've never said straight out that Anna cares for me. I don't like it, but it 's a chance — admitting that what you think could possibly be true — it 's just a chance." He raised his head.

"And if your chance fails — ?"

"Then I resign. You can do what you like."

She smiled with quick intelligence. "You have given me new life, Maurice. I feel at last that I 've a right to exist."

He held out his hand. "I 'm glad somebody feels like that. I 'll say good-bye now."

She took the hand impulsively. "Have some lunch before you go? You 're wearing yourself out."

He smiled dryly. "Thanks; somehow I don't feel like lunch — have n't these six days."

Mrs. Maxtead watched him walk to the door. "Till to-morrow, Maurice!" she said.

"Yes. Till to-morrow!"

Five seconds later she heard the hall door shut.

PART THREE — CHAPTER VIII

ON the same day there was a stir in the rooms above the curio shop — the vague restless stir that hangs about grave illness like a premature pall. From the moment of Anna's coming — from his first excited recognition of her as his wife — Solny had failed perceptibly. His life had for years been the life of a spent taper, needing no more than a gust of rough wind to extinguish its light; and her coming had, in all unconsciousness, proved to be that wind. When the vigour of existence is at its ebb, a shock of joy is often as relentlessly fatal as a shock of sorrow; and on the morning when Strode and Mrs. Maxtead confronted their difficulties in Palace Court, the steady decline that for days had been gaining ground made its first uncovered attack.

Before twelve o'clock Solny fainted twice. The doctor, hurriedly sent for, examined him with unusual minuteness, gave his directions laconically, and departed, promising to look in again in two hours' time. He was back in Felt Street in an hour and a half.

The patient was sleeping, but his breathing was alarmingly weak. For the first time the doctor became personal; he looked at Anna in a new way.

"You must take care of yourself," he said. "We can't have *you* breaking down."

She glanced up from her place by her father's pillow. "I sha'n't break down," she said.

He continued to look at her with a shrewdness that brought Penrhyn to her mind.

"I wish you'd have a nurse — "

She shook her head.

"It would be wiser, you know — " He came round to her side. "I don't want to frighten you — "

She glanced at him sharply.

"But it's my duty to say — to prepare you — " He stopped. He was young; he wanted intensely to be kind; but a practice in the southeast does not encourage tact.

Anna's eyes dilated. "Oh no," she said, "it can't be, it couldn't be — so soon."

He patted her shoulder awkwardly. "Come," he said, "be plucky! He's old — life is n't worth much to us when we come to that — " He indicated the bed.

Solny's figure showed up through the bed-clothes like an effigy on a tomb; his face, so prematurely worn, was the colour of yellow wax, except where dark hollows showed under the eyes.

Anna looked; then looked away. "I understand what you mean," she said.

The doctor was disconcerted; he was unused to patients who took such news in a frozen way. He touched her shoulder again.

"You have done everything for him — that must be a consolation."

She said nothing.

He picked up his hat and moved to the door. "I'll look in again once — perhaps twice — before night. There's nothing to be done beyond what I've said."

The girl nodded.

"And take care of yourself. Remember it's kinder to him — he may want you later on."

"I'll remember."

"Do. Good-day!"

"Good-day!"

He went out, closed the door, and passed downstairs.

Anna stayed immovable, her hand on her father's, her eyes fixed rigidly on the opposite wall.

In the shop the doctor paused by the desk.

"He's failing fast," he said.

Johann looked up in alarm.

"And I want you to look to the girl. It's nothing to do with me, but I can't quite place that girl; and I think she wants seeing to. She'll be my next patient if we don't look out. We are all animals, you know, and we all need our environment. It's very plain that she's out of hers."

Johann paled, partly understanding. "What am I to do?" he said.

The doctor looked at him. "Rouse her in some

way," he said; "make her cry, for choice. A woman's generally safe if you can make her cry. I don't like her eyes — they're too dry and too expectant for her age. How old is she? Twenty-two?"

"Twenty-four."

"I see! Well, I'll drop in again. Take the old man quietly; he'll give no trouble. Good-day!"

"Good-day, sir!"

Johann in his turn was left alone.

PART THREE—CHAPTER IX

WITH sickening slowness the day wore on; three times between noon and four Johann crept upstairs, but each time Anna's rigid face kept him dumb or sent him away despairing. Questioned on any point, she answered in monosyllables; haltingly sympathised with, she seemed not to hear. At the given times she zealously administered the medicines and nourishment to her father; in the intervals she knelt quite motionless by the bed.

At four the doctor came again. He stayed in the sick man's room for nearly half an hour; but what he was doing there — whether attending upon Solny or trying to break through Anna's chilled quiet, Johann never knew, having an affair of his own on hand.

As the doctor, having finished his visit, passed through the parlour into the shop, he saw a slight tall man leave by the street door; the man was well dressed and walked quickly, almost agitatedly, it seemed. It struck him as an odd episode; but odd episodes become casual in a doctor's life. He turned to Johann, huddled behind the counter.

"Well," he said, "you haven't done much. She's still ice."

Johann did n't speak; he seemed curiously upset. His face had a scared look, his lips were unsteady.

"Well?" said the other. "Did n't you do anything?"

"I tried — I tried, but she would n't speak to me."

The doctor pursed his lips. "Tush, man! I told *you* to speak to *her*." Then he looked at his watch. "I must be getting on."

Johann moved uneasily; some secret agitation was working in his face.

His companion watched him, then moved towards the door. "I'll turn in again," he said. "And remember what I said — It 's *you* who must speak to *her*."

Johann raised his head. "Yes," he said sharply, "it is I must speak to her." He repeated the words with a strange intonation, as if meaning them, not for his questioner, but for himself.

The doctor pondered on the point as he walked briskly down the street.

Johann sat behind the counter until six o'clock. At six he shut the shop. Ten minutes later Anna heard a knock on Solny's door.

She looked up with sharp relief as the sound fell. She was corking a medicine bottle, and her fingers, usually so steady, slipped and stumbled over the task. It was early evening, but the room, full of light in

the morning, was the first in the house to catch the chill of approaching dusk. Already there were shadows in the corners and a bluish tinge in the whiteness of the bed-clothes. She answered the knock with a haste that betrayed strung nerves.

Johann entered softly, moved across the room with almost stealthy quiet, and paused by the window-seat.

Anna held up her finger. "He is asleep again!" She finished corking the bottle, then crossed to Johann's side.

"Johann," she said, "I'm so glad you've come. I thought I had offended you, and I — I began to have such silly ideas, and imagine that you would n't come back at all. Was n't it absurd?" She laughed, a faint unsteady laugh, then caught herself up. "How horrible!" she said. "I never meant to laugh — the sound slipped out by itself; I must be all nerves. Johann, do I seem all nerves?"

Johann did not look at her. "What does that mean?" he said. "What do you mean when you say 'nerves'?"

"Oh." She made a gesture with her hands. "Oh, it means that you are all — all in little bits; it means that you keep fearfully still, because you are afraid to let yourself go; it means — oh, Johann, it means that you've had enough — that you can't possibly bear any more — that you are utterly, utterly broken down —" She sank on the window-seat and hid her face — a wave of silent tearless sobbing shaking her from head to foot.

It was a terrible form of grief to witness — perfectly soundless, perfectly concentrated; it was more harassing than any flood of tears. Johann was beside himself; the tide of his love swelled up futilely. He touched her hands, her arm, her hair. He even knelt beside her and strove to raise her face.

"Anna!" he whispered beseechingly. "Anna!" His adoration of her shook incoherently in his voice.

Her shoulders moved convulsively; the silence of the room continued, broken only by the agitated indrawing of her breath. Solny slept on. Johann looked from one figure to the other, his incapacity goading him. At last he caught her wrists.

"Anna, tell me what I am to do?"

The pain and despair in his voice reached her; she looked up with haggard eyes.

"No one can do anything. No one."

It was then, suddenly, that strength came to Johann.

"Anna," he said, with sharp emphasis, "have you ever been glad that you came home? Have you ever — ever once — been glad that you came back? I want to know."

Anna bent her face, but he held her wrists; his hungry eyes compelled an answer. For a second she met his glance unwillingly, then something in its intensity fired her. The strenuous need for truth flamed up again, the wild wish to have done with patience and pretence caught her as it had done before.

"No, Johann," she said, "I have never once been glad. I have felt a prisoner — I have hated it from the first — " She barely breathed the words, but each syllable reached him. Again she bent her face, but this time her wrists were free.

The change struck her; she looked up.

"Johann!" she said nervously. "Johann!"

Johann had turned to the fireplace. He looked shrunken and wofully small.

She rose uncertainly. "Johann," she said again. There was a tinge of fear in her voice.

He did not turn.

"Johann, I have hurt you."

"No. I think I knew all along. I would n't believe — that was all."

Solny stirred a little at this point. Anna moved to the bed, bending over it in quick solicitude.

Johann made no effort to move. Deep in his mind he felt numbed — too numbed ever to move again. After a long dreary silence he spoke.

"Why did you come back at all?" he asked.

Anna raised her head; she was still standing by the bed. She tried to reply, but no rational sentence formed itself. She felt crushed by the enormity of her act.

"What made you think of coming back? I want to know."

She moved a little towards the window, then stopped. She felt like the prisoner arraigned and already condemned. With a desperate wish to anti-

cipate her judgment, she went suddenly forward to where Johann stood.

"I 'll tell you everything, Johann — from the very first to the last. Let me tell you everything. I have craved to tell it all along, only I wanted to be brave —"

His shoulders were hunched; he leant heavily on the mantel-board.

"Johann, can you hear what I say?"

"Yes, I can hear." His tone was dull and strange.

"I told you the other night why I went away long ago — how I was lured away through my fear for you — how I was not to blame in that; I told you how Mrs. Maxtead kept her word and appeased Golstock — though the jewels were never found; I told you how for three years I remembered you, and for the other three forgot. You know all that; it is the other part — the later part — that you do not know —" She paused and pushed back her hair.

Johann's shoulders stirred very slightly, otherwise he was quiet.

"Two months ago, Johann, I met a man — an American named Maurice Strode —" She watched him and saw him lay his arm more heavily on the cheap chimney-board. "We became friends. I went to Cornwall with Mrs. Maxtead and he was there. Before I left Cornwall we were engaged to be married."

Johann's arm dropped and he moved round; his face had the bluish tinge that it had worn on the

night of his rescue; the scar on his temple showed darker and deeper than usual.

"Did you love him?" he asked.

Anna put up her hand. "Wait!" she said. "Wait! It's all got to be told." She stepped to the bed, arranging the quilt with unsteady hands, then walked back again.

"Until then, Johann — up to the time I left Cornwall — he did n't know my name, did n't know who I was — it was a whim of mine to make him care for me, just for myself. And on the night before I left he told me a story — the story of a girl who had left her home and forgotten her people, whose father had gone mad at the loss of her, and whose oldest friend was slaving day after day in the place that ought to have been hers — "

Johann's head was lifted, his dull eyes devoured her face, he had the look of an animal that stands with ears alert.

"He told me the story word for word, bitterly and harshly. He, who is so loyal himself, could find no excuse, could find no loophole — not one — not even a tiny one. He said that such a woman is branded — branded, Johann. Say that slowly over to yourself."

Johann moistened his lips. "Did you love him?" he asked again.

"Love him? I cared for him with every scrap of feeling. Every word he said cut deep down, like a red-hot knife. I wonder I lived through that night."

At her first words Johann stepped back; as she went on he came forward again, looking stupidly on the floor.

"You never told him? He never knew?"

"Not till afterwards. If you had heard him speak that night, if you had seen his face, you would n't ask. I could n't have told him, Johann; no woman could have told him, then." She stopped and turned to the window. In her absorption she had almost forgotten that she had a listener; in the new freedom of speech she had overlooked the pain that her words might have for him. Presently she turned back into the room and spoke afresh, her voice wavering in her effort to keep it low.

"Do you wonder that I 'm the most wretched girl on earth?" she asked. "I knew that he would hate me and despise me once he understood; but I am a woman and I hoped. Oh, Johann, I have hoped and prayed, and prayed and hoped that he might grow to understand and to forgive; you don't know what I have suffered in these last days. I have tried to live for my father, and now he is going; I shall be alone, fearfully, utterly alone." She sank down again on the window-seat.

Johann lowered his head and after a minute raised it again. There was a peculiar look in his face; the immature perplexity that had always possessed it was gone, giving place to a great comprehension; his eyes looked infinitely pained, but his weak mouth had ceased to tremble.

"You have me, Anna," he said.

Anna's face was covered; she laughed a little, wildly. "Poor Johann!" she said below her breath and without looking up.

Johann winced.

"Would you be afraid if I went out for a little? I have been indoors these five days."

She glanced up miserably.

"Of course not; only don't be longer than you need." She looked towards the bed, then let her head droop again.

He followed the direction of her eyes.

"No," he said thoughtfully; "not longer than I need."

After that there was silence in the room, a silence so long that at last Anna looked up. She looked up hastily, then she rose hastily. The room was bare. Johann had gone.

PART THREE—CHAPTER X

IT was after eight; Strode was pacing to and fro between the door and the windows of the sitting-room. The windows were open, but the curtains were drawn; the small round table was set for dinner; the high lamp by the desk had a soft-coloured shade. Everything on the surface suggested comfort and ease; the only uncongenial note in the harmony of the whole being the occupant himself. He was neatly and carefully dressed, but long and unrelieved suspense tells in outward signs on even the strongest man. To the most casual observer Strode was changed.

As he walked his hands were clasped loosely behind his back; his head, usually so sharply alert, was bent; a great dejection, reaching almost to despair, was apparent in his face. Nearly four hours ago he had played his last card and had lost; now he faced Fate bankrupt.

He paced the floor hurriedly, with the speed of a man who tries to outrun himself. Once the evening paper was swept from the desk by his hasty movements, and he pushed it aside with his foot; then, pausing on the impulse, he picked it up, and, smoothing it, carried it to the lamp. There, with a set

face, he scanned the latest announcements — the accidents; strange discoveries; deaths, suicidal and otherwise. The survey was rapid; as he finished, the harassed line between his eyebrows smoothed itself momentarily, and with a short exclamation of relief he dropped the paper again and recommenced his pacing of the room.

Twice he walked backwards and forwards; then he stopped by the desk, sat down abruptly, and drew the inkstand forward. Then again he paused; he was in the mood to be distracted by the slightest sound, and downstairs he had heard the door-bell ring. He listened for a second, then, shrugging his shoulders, took up a pen. But he could not write. He began the heading of a letter, then paused once more; he was certain he had heard a step on the stairs. He laughed angrily. People had passed up and down those stairs before he was born; there was no reason to suppose the stairs would be deserted even after he was dead. He laughed again. Then suddenly he threw the pen aside and rose; the steps had stopped outside his door.

He stood up — very straight and stiff. Someone knocked on the door; to his overstrained ears it sounded a timid knock.

"Come in!" he called.

It was several seconds before the door opened; then it only opened partly, allowing a face to be seen in the aperture. The face was pinched and pale, with eyes that looked unnaturally large.

Strode wanted to come forward, wanted hard to say something, but he stood silent and still. He was uncertain of what he expected; he was uncertain whether the excitement that galvanised him through and through was the excitement of hope or of fear; he only knew that it was excitement, as opposed to the ghastly inaction of the past week. He turned abruptly to the fireplace, and took a pipe from the pipe-rack that hung above it.

Johann moved forward cautiously. Once more he was the creature Strode had known — reticent, subdued, full of hidden depths.

Strode stretched his hand to the tobacco-jar and began to fill his pipe. He scarcely saw what he was doing, he cared a good deal less; but such a man, in such a moment, must be occupied.

The other moved into the room and stood by the table; the yellow glow from the lamp threw a trying light, accentuating all that was meagre and unprepossessing in his face.

Strode struck a match and held it suspended in the air. "Well?" he said quietly. "Well?"

Johann steadied himself, passing his tongue over his lips.

"I lied," he said plainly; "she was there all along."

Strode said nothing. It is as hard — to some natures it is harder — to take good news strongly than to take bad; possibly he reached the highest point in his control when he stood quiet and speechless, letting Johann's words sink into his mind. The

colour round his mouth paled a little; once or twice his fingers twitched; beyond that he made no sign. The match burnt down, scorching his hand; he dropped it into the grate, then, with his involuntary gesture, he slowly smoothed his hair.

"Well?" he said again. "Well?"

Johann shook slightly.

"Well, what have you to say?" He struck another match, lighted his pipe, and began to smoke fiercely.

The other picked up a book and toyed with it. "When you came to the shop to-day you said that she loved you; I did n't believe it then — I would n't believe it. She had come back to us of her own will. How could I believe it —?" His tone was thin and sharp.

Strode turned abruptly; he leant against the mantelpiece and smoked harder than before.

"But after you went I got afraid. I waited a long time — thinking; then I went upstairs —" Johann broke off and dropped the book.

Strode's head was bent; he was enveloped in a cloud of smoke.

"I went upstairs and I asked her quite plainly if she was content —" He spoke with an effort. "She cried — she cried until she could no longer pretend; and then suddenly I found that all along I had known — that all along I had known, only I would not let myself know. I knew that she was miserable with us; that she no more belonged to us than the stars in the sky belong, though we can see their light —" He broke off again.

Strode put down his pipe. "Did you tell her about me?"

"No." Johann looked round. "She had told me that she loves you —"

Strode said nothing; he, too, was thinking hard.

The other mistook his silence. "It is for her that I come here — not for you."

Still Strode was silent.

Johann's pain flickered up in a tinge of defiance. "I lied to you," he said, "and I would lie again — if it could do any good. I wanted her; I had waited for her and wanted her for eight years — I, who have nothing. And you — you, who have everything, you came to rob her back from me on the first day — the very first day. It is no wonder that I lied." He moved to the desk: he was white and excited; for almost the first time in his life he was speaking out his heart, and the expression exalted him in an ecstasy of pain. "Oh yes," he said, "I would lie again; I would lie to all the world if it could keep her — but it can't — it can't. She belongs to you — she has always belonged to you. Once she pitied me, now she will despise me; it is very plain that there is no place in the world for one like me —" His face contracted; he glanced hopelessly at Strode with his silence, his averted face, his suggestion of inevitableness; then his false strength gave way.

"She saved me," he said, "and I repaid her with pain; you were kind to me, and I lied to you; now, even God forgets me —" He turned to the wall.

As he finished, Strode moved slowly round; his face had the look of one who wholly understands; his eyes were steady and clear. Without a word he held out his hand.

At his movement Johann looked back into the room; as he turned, deprecation and alarm gave place slowly to blank surprise. He glanced at the outstretched hand, then upwards, in a bewildered way, to Strode's face.

"But I lied to you —"

Strode said nothing; his hand did not move.

Dazedly and automatically Johann came forward; at last he extended his own.

Their hands met; then Strode released his and walked to the door.

"You know where I 'm going," he said. "Wait here till I come back."

Johann returned no answer; he had dropped into a chair by the desk.

On the threshold Strode stopped and looked back; quite quietly he re-crossed the room and put his hand on the other's shoulder.

"I 'd have done the same myself," he said. "I 'm about sure I 'd have done the same myself. Just remember that."

Johann's head was buried in his arm; he raised it for an instant, and then let it droop again. In the instant Strode saw that his face was marked with tears.

PART THREE—CHAPTER XI

IN Anna's room the close cloak of dusk had shaken itself out; on the floor the strip of Eastern carpet — coloured as ever, seemingly unchangeable — loomed a sombre suggestion of orange and blue; on the wall John Desinski's portrait of a red-haired child, softened and mellowed by time, still gazed wonderingly at an unfathomed world; by the narrow bed, her knees pressing the old prayer-marks, her elbows buried in the patched quilt, knelt Anna herself — very quiet, very inert. She knelt with bent head and listening ears, her heart beating in little starts and jerks, her mind under steady control, lest in the silence and solitude of the house it might crash into wild confusion.

For many minutes she remained still, her hands pressed tightly over her eyes, her lips from time to time moving in soundless prayers. Then sharply and unexpectedly the Dutch clock downstairs struck nine.

She rose nervously, glancing behind her at the shut door; then she walked to the wash-stand, poured some water into the basin, and bathed her face. The cold of the water refreshed her; she used the towel slowly, then laying it aside moved to

the small unsteady dressing-table and took up a comb. There was practically no light in the room, but mechanically she passed it through the coil of hair above her forehead — moving as if in a dream. Still with the same dazed action she bent to replace it, but before it could touch the table it dropped from her hand with a clatter, and she caught the table ledge nervously, jarring its contents. Downstairs — not at the shop entrance, but at the small door leading from the yard into the Passage — someone was knocking with hurried impatient taps.

Anna paled, then the relief and possibility of a human presence — any human presence — seized her; and groping her way in confused haste to the door, she opened it and stepped on to the corridor.

On the corridor she paused; before her lay the stairs, dim and steep; to her right showed the shut door of her father's room, a black patch in the heavy gloom. She shivered. A louder, more impatient knock sounded through the house. She gathered her strength together, as a frightened child might have done, and without a look to either hand ran down the stairs as if pursued.

The ground floor reached, she hurried through the kitchen, opening the bars of the yard door with unsteady hands; then from the kitchen she passed into the yard itself, where the moss of mould clung to the walls and the grass blades forced themselves between the cobbles. There, there was light; overhead the sky, pale and summer-like, was scattered

with countless stars; from above the wall of the Passage a gas-lamp threw a sickly glow.

Another knock fell on the door; she drew a quick grateful breath. The thought that a fellow creature was within three feet held wonderful attraction. She crossed the yard hastily and paused by the door in the wall.

"Who 's there?" she asked. "Who are you?"

For an interval there was no reply. She leant close to the chink; she heard someone stir abruptly; she could have sworn that she heard someone take and let go a breath.

"Who is it?" she asked again nervously. "Johann? Dr. Kaine — ?"

There was a fresh second of uncertain waiting; then a voice — the one voice comprising everything, promising everything — broke on her, eager and alert.

"I, dearest — Maurice. Let me in."

Her fingers grasped the bolt, then hung nerveless and incapable. She leant against the woodwork faintly, her lips parted, her senses swaying.

Strode tapped again urgently. "Let me in," he whispered. "Anna, dearest, let me in."

At the caressing intonation she sprang up, her fingers shook palpably, but the bolt yielded. A second after Strode was in the yard.

He came forward with a rush; then he halted, struck by her fragility, her pallor, her ethereal look. The light in the yard, misty white with starlight, yellow from the gas, had a halo-like effect. With

something of fear, something of hesitation, he held out his hands.

She raised her head and looked at him, then she ran forward and caught the hands in her own.

"You care, Maurice? You care — ?"

"Dear, I worship you."

That was all. Question and answer, it compassed and covered all. When hearts are over-full, they seldom run to speech. When sorrow has broken in on love, love, left alone again, is hesitant and shy, more prone to look and kiss and hold than to mend his wounds with words. There was all the length of life in which to explain; for the moment they were together, and no explanation, no satisfaction, could balance that.

Anna rested against his shoulder with closed eyes. Now, for the first time, she knew how bitterly rest was needed. But the thought of rest brought the thought of fatigue — fatigue the thought of duty — duty the remembrance of many things. She started up again, opening her eyes.

"Maurice," she said, "my father is dead; he died nearly two hours ago. I had forgotten — since you came —" She stopped suddenly. In the conflicting lights her red hair looked dark, her grey eyes almost black.

Strode started. "Dead!" he said. "Your father?"

"Yes. He has been ill since I came, very, very ill." She caught his hand to reassure him. "We expected it, Maurice; we knew he was going to die."

He gathered his ideas. "And you were alone with him?" he said slowly. "You mean to say that you were alone — absolutely alone with him?" He looked down, horrified and incredulous.

She pressed closer. "I was n't afraid, Maurice, I could n't have been afraid, he was so terribly gentle. He just went out, as you blow a candle. I was n't a bit afraid — till afterwards. Afterwards, when I realised — and it grew dark —" She shivered, laying her face against his sleeve.

He caught her to him sharply and quickly. "I don't know what to say, Anna. I don't dare ask you to forgive —"

Her eyes widened. "Forgive?" she said. "Forgive what?"

"Everything; but that 's for another day. Come inside."

Unresistingly she let him lead her through the kitchen door. In the kitchen the slacked fire gave a faint glow. He disengaged himself, struck a match, and lighted the old copper lamp.

They stood in silence looking at each other, then Strode spoke again gently.

"I 've never seen your father, Anna. May I go upstairs?"

Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "Take me with you," she said. "He must know, he must understand — now; and there are things — things I want to say."

He pressed her fingers comprehendingly, then

picked up the lamp. Together they moved to the door, but at the door a new idea struck Anna.

"Maurice," she said, pausing, "is this the first time that you 've been here since I came back?"

The question was direct. He looked down at her, the full flood of lamplight falling on his face.

"It 's the tenth time, or the eleventh — I 'm not sure which."

She gasped and drew back. "Then Johann —" She waited. "Johann — ?"

He laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Johann is human, Anna — very much the same as you or me."

There was silence for a space. He held the lamp above his head steadily. Anna's eyes were on the ground; she was fitting things together with dread and doubt. At last, with a rush of apprehension, she looked up afresh.

"Johann went for you to-night? It was for you he went?"

Strode nodded.

"He is alone now? You left him somewhere alone and wretched?" There was self-accusation and fear in her tone.

Strode touched her shoulder again. "We all have times when we are best alone — fights that we must fight alone."

She continued to look at him. "But Johann, Maurice — Johann —"

He moved back into the kitchen, and set down the lamp.

"Come here," he said; "I have something to say."

She moved slowly towards him. He held out his hand. Nervously she laid hers in it. He drew her close, quietly and protectively.

"Now listen. Once long ago Mrs. Maxtead tried to scare you about Johann — you see I know all your secrets. Once long ago she told you that Johann was the type of man who takes his own life — under certain circumstances. Now there she was wholly wrong; I can prove that she was wrong."

Anna looked up. He touched her hair fondly.

"When you left this house eight years ago, you left two people heart-broken. One" — he lowered his voice — "one of the two gave the greatest proof of heart-break a man can give. You know what I mean."

She bowed her head.

"But the other" — he straightened himself, speaking alertly and quick — "the other, Anna, what did he do? Remember, the loss was almost as great to him. What did he do? Did he kill himself? Did he think of killing himself? No; he took his place behind the counter and just went on with life."

Anna moved close to him. "You are very comforting, Maurice."

He smiled. "I 'm just practical, that 's all. They say it 's the weak men who kill themselves. I 've always doubted that. Johann is standing in chaos now; but things will settle down — things have a marvellous, unbelievable way of settling down. He

has come into this world warped. What he wants is a new standpoint. He 's like a plant in poor soil: he wants digging out — he wants transplanting. I propose that we do the gardening. What do you say?"

Anna was silent.

"Dearest, you could do a lot, if you only would. A little kindness, a little friendship, is all he really wants. In his soul he never contemplated asking any more — I believe that. He used to say you were the sun. Well, most people want a ray or two of the sun now and then — to help them to keep warm."

Anna was still silent. Two hot tears fell on Strode's hand.

He caught her suddenly and closely in his arms. "You see I 'm generous, dear. Do you guess why?"

She looked up. Her face was glowing; her eyes looked clear and steadfast as the sea at Trescar.

"Why, Maurice?"

He looked down; his face caught the glow from hers, and his lips bent.

"Because I know that I 'm standing in the full light."

THE END.

POPULAR COPYRIGHT BOOKS

AT MODERATE PRICES — **Any of the following titles can be bought of your Bookseller at the price you paid for this volume**

Adventures of Captain Kettle. Cutcliffe Hyne.
Adventures of Gerard. A. Conan Doyle.
Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. A. Conan Doyle
Alton of Somasco. Harold Bindloss.
Arms and the Woman. Harold MacGrath.
Artemus Ward's Works (extra illustrated).
At the Mercy of Tiberius. Augusta Evans Wilson.
Battle Ground, The. Ellen Glasgow.
Belle of Bowling Green, The. Amelia E. Barr.
Ben Blair. Will Lillibridge.
Bob, Son of Battle. Alfred Ollivant.
Boss, The. Alfred Henry Lewis.
Brass Bowl, The. Louis Joseph Vance.
Brethren, The. H. Rider Haggard.
By Snare of Love. Arthur W. Marchmont.
By Wit of Woman. Arthur W. Marchmont.
Cap'n Erie. Joseph C. Lincoln.
Captain in the Ranks, A. George Cary Eggleston.
Cardigan. Robert W. Chambers.
Casting Away of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine. Frank R. Stockton.
Circle, The. Katherine Cecil Thurston (author of "The Masquerader," "The Gambler").
Conquest of Canaan, The. Booth Tarkington.
Courier of Fortune, A. Arthur W. Marchmont.
Darrow Enigma, The. Melvin Severy.
Deliverance, The. Ellen Glasgow.
Exploits of Brigadier Gerard. A. Conan Doyle.
Fighting Chance, The. Robert W. Chambers.
For a Maiden Brave. Chauncey C. Hotchkiss.
For Love or Crown. Arthur W. Marchmont.
Fugitive Blacksmith, The. Charles D. Stewart.
Heart's Highway, The. Mary E. Wilkins.
Holladay Case, The. Burton Egbert Stevenson.
Hurricane Island. H. B. Marriott-Watson.
Indifference of Juliet, The. Grace S. Richmond.
Infelice. Augusta Evans Wilson.
In the Name of a Woman. Arthur W. Marchmont.
Lady Betty Across the Water. C. N. and A. M. Williamson.
Lane That Had No Turning, The. Gilbert Parker.
Leavenworth Case, The. Anna Katharine Green.
Lilac Sunbonnet, The. S. R. Crockett.
Lin McLean. Owen Wister.
Long Night, The. Stanley J. Weyman.
Maid at Arms, The. Robert W. Chambers.
Man from Red Keg, The. Eugene Thwing.

A. L. BURT CO., Publishers, 52-58 Duane St., New York City

POPULAR COPYRIGHT BOOKS

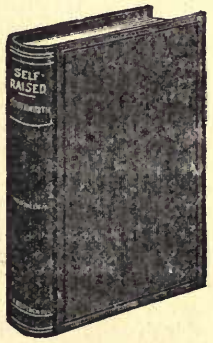
AT MODERATE PRICES Any of the following titles can be bought of your Bookseller at the price you paid for this volume

Marathon Mystery, The. Burton Egbert Stevenson.
Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes. A. Conan Doyle.
Millionaire Baby, The. Anna Katharine Green.
Missourian, The. Eugene P. Lyle, Jr.
My Friend the Chauffeur. C. N. and A. M. Williamson
My Lady of the North. Randall Parrish.
Mystery of June 13th. Melvin L. Severy.
Mystery Tales. Edgar Allen Poe.
Nancy Stair. Elinor Macartney Lane.
None But the Brave. Hamblen Sears.
Order No. 11. Caroline Abbot Stanley.
Pam. Bettina von Hutten.
Pam Decides. Bettina von Hutten.
Partners of the Tide. Joseph C. Lincoln.
Phra the Phoenician. Edwin Lester Arnold.
President, The. Alfred Henry Lewis.
Princess Passes, The. C. N. and A. M. Williamson.
Private War, The. Louis Joseph Vance.
Prodigal Son, The. Hall Caine.
Queen's Advocate, The. Arthur W. Marchmont.
Quickening, The. Francis Lynde.
Richard the Brazen. Cyrus Townsend Brady and Edward Peple.
Rose of the World. Agnes and Egerton Castle.
Sarita the Carlist. Arthur W. Marchmont.
Seats of the Mighty, The. Gilbert Parker.
Sir Nigel. A. Conan Doyle.
Sir Richard Calmady. Lucas Malet.
Speckled Bird. Augusta Evans Wilson.
Spoilers, The. Rex Beach.
Sunset Trail, The. Alfred Henry Lewis.
Sword of the Old Frontier, A. Randall Parrish.
Tales of Sherlock Holmes. A. Conan Doyle.
That Printer of Udell's. Harold Bell Wright.
Throwback, The. Alfred Henry Lewis.
Trail of the Sword, The. Gilbert Parker.
Two Vanrevels, The. Booth Tarkington.
Up From Slavery. Booker T. Washington.
Vashti. Augusta Evans Wilson.
Viper of Milan, The (original edition). Marjorie Bowen.
Voice of the People, The. Ellen Glasgow.
Wheel of Life, The. Ellen Glasgow.
When I Was Czar. Arthur W. Marchmont.
When Wilderness Was King. Randall Parrish.
Woman in Grey, A. Mrs. C. N. Williamson.
Woman in the Alcove, The. Anna Katharine Green.

A. L. BURT CO., Publishers, 52-58 Duane St., New York City

POPULAR LITERATURE FOR THE MASSES, COMPRISING CHOICE SELECTIONS FROM THE TREASURES OF THE WORLD'S KNOWLEDGE, ISSUED IN A SUBSTANTIAL AND ATTRACTIVE CLOTH BINDING, AT A POPULAR PRICE

BURT'S HOME LIBRARY is a series which includes the standard works of the world's best literature, bound in uniform cloth binding, gilt tops, embracing chiefly selections from writers of the most notable English, American and Foreign Fiction, together with many important works in the domains of History, Biography, Philosophy, Travel, Poetry and the Essays.



A glance at the following annexed list of titles and authors will endorse the claim that the publishers make for it—that it is the most comprehensive, choice, interesting, and by far the most carefully selected series of standard authors for world-wide reading that has been produced by any publishing house in any country, and that at prices so cheap, and in a style so substantial and pleasing, as to win for it millions of readers and the approval and commendation, not only of the book trade throughout the American continent, but of hundreds of thousands of librarians, clergymen, educators and men of letters interested in the dissemination of instructive, entertaining and thoroughly wholesome reading matter for the masses.

[SEE FOLLOWING PAGES]

Abbe Constantin. By Ludovic Halevy.
Abbott, By Sir Walter Scott.
Adam Bede. By George Eliot.
Addison's Essays. Edited by John Richard Green.
Aeneid of Virgil. Translated by John Connington.
Aesop's Fables.
Alexander, the Great, Life of. By John Williams.
Alfred the Great, Life of. By Thomas Hughes.
Alhambra By Washington Irving.
Alice in Wonderland, and Through the Looking-Glass. By Lewis Carroll
Alice Lorraine. By R. D. Blackmore
All Sorts and Conditions of Men. By Walter Besant.
Alton Locke. By Charles Kingsley.
Amiel's Journal. Translated by Mrs. Humphrey Ward.
Andersen's Fairy Tales.
Anne of Geirstein. By Sir Walter Scott.
Antiquary. By Sir Walter Scott.
Arabian Nights' Entertainments.
Ardath. By Marie Corelli.
Arnold, Benedict, Life of. By George Canning Hill.
Arnold's Poems. By Matthew Arnold.
Around the World in the Yacht Sunbeam. By Mrs. Brassey.
Arundel Motto. By Mary Cecil Hay.
At the Back of the North Wind. By George Macdonald.
Attic Philosopher. By Emile Souvestre.
Auld Licht Idylls. By James M. Barrie.
Aunt Diana. By Rosa N. Carey.
Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin.
Autocrat of the Breakfast Table. By O. W. Holmes.
Averil. By Rosa N. Carey.
Bacon's Essays. By Francis Bacon.
Barbara Heathcote's Trial. By Rosa N. Carey.
Barnaby Rudge. By Charles Dickens.
Barrack Room Ballads. By Rudyard Kipling.
Betrothed. By Sir Walter Scott.
Beulah. By Augusta J. Evans.
Black Beauty, By Anna Sewall.
Black Dwarf. By Sir Walter Scott.
Black Rock. By Ralph Connor.
Black Tulip. By Alexandre Dumas.
Bleak House. By Charles Dickens.
Blithedale Romance. By Nathaniel Hawthorne.
Bondman. By Hall Caine.
Book of Golden Deeds. By Charlotte M. Yonge.
Boone, Daniel, Life of. By Cecil B. Hartley.
Bride of Lammermoor By Sir Walter Scott.
Bride of the Nile. By George Ebers.
Browning's Poems By Elizabeth Barrett Browning.
Browning's Poems. (selections.) By Robert Browning.
Bryant's Poems. (early.) By William Cullen Bryant.
Burgomaster's Wife. By George Ebers.
Burn's Poems. By Robert Burns.
By Order of the King. By Victor Hugo.
Byron's Poems. By Lord Byron.
Caesar, Julius, Life of. By James Anthony Froude.
Carson, Kit, Life of. By Charles Burdett.
Cary's Poems. By Alice and Phoebe Cary.
Cast Up by the Sea. By Sir Samuel Baker.
Charlemagne (Charles the Great), Life of. By Thomas Hodgkin D. C. L.
Charles Auchester. By E. Berger.
Character. By Samuel Smiles.
Charles O'Malley. By Charles Lever.
Chesterfield's Letters. By Lord Chesterfield.
Chevalier de Maison Rouge. By Alexandre Dumas.
Chicot the Jester. By Alexandre Dumas.
Children of the Abbey. By Regina Maria Roche.
Child's History of England. By Charles. Dickens.
Christmas Stories. By Charles Dickens.
Cloister and the Hearth. By Charles Reade.
Coleridge's Poems. By Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
Columbus, Christopher, Life of. By Washington Irving.
Companions of Jehu. By Alexandre Dumas.
Complete Angler. By Walton and Cotton.
Conduct of Life. By Ralph Waldo Emerson.
Confessions of an Opium Eater. By Thomas de Quincey.
Conquest of Granada. By Washington Irving.
Conscript. By Erckmann-Chatrian.
Conspiracy of Pontiac. By Francis Parkman, Jr.
Conspirators. By Alexandre Dumas.
Consuelo. By George Sand.
Cook's Voyages. By Captain James Cook.
Corinne. By Madame de Stael.
Countess de Charney. By Alexandre Dumas.
Countess Gisela. By E. Marlitt.

Countess of Rudolstadt. By George Sand.
Count Robert of Paris. By Sir Walter Scott.
Country Doctor. By Honore de Balzac.
Courtship of Miles Standish. By H. W. Longfellow.
Cousin Maude. By Mary J. Holmes.
Cranford. By Mrs. Gaskell.
Crockett, David, Life of. An Autobiography.
Cromwell, Oliver, Life of. By Edwin Paxton Hood.
Crown of Wild Olive. By John Ruskin'
Crusades. By Geo. W. Cox, M. A.
Daniel Deronda. By George Eliot.
Darkness and Daylight. By Mary J. Holmes.
Data of Ethics. By Herbert Spencer.
Daughter of an Empress, The. By Louisa Muhlbach.
David Copperfield. By Charles Dickens.
Days of Bruce. By Grace Aguilar.
Deemster, The. By Hall Caine.
Deerslayer, The. By James Fenimore Cooper.
Descent of Man. By Charles Darwin.
Discourses of Epictetus. Translated by George Long.
Divine Comedy. (Dante.) Translated by Rev. H. F. Carey.
Dombey & Son. By Charles Dickens.
Donal Grant. By George Macdonald.
Donovan. By Edna Lyall.
Dora Deane. By Mary J. Holmes.
Dove in the Eagle's Nest. By Charlotte M. Yonge.
Dream Life. By Ik Marvel.
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. By R. L. Stevenson.
Duty. By Samuel Smiles.
Early Days of Christianity. By F. W. Farrar.
East Lynne. By Mrs. Henry Wood.
Edith Lyle's Secret. By Mary J. Holmes.
Education. By Herbert Spencer.
Egoist. By George Meredith.
Egyptian Princess. By George Ebers.
Eight Hundred Leagues on the Amazon. By Jules Verne.
Eliot's Poems. By George Eliot.
Elizabeth and her German Garden.
Elizabeth (Queen of England), Life of. By Edward Spencer Beesly, M.A.
Elsie Venner. By Oliver Wendell Holmes.
Emerson's Essays. (complete.) By Ralph Waldo Emerson.
Emerson's Poems. By Ralph Waldo Emerson.
English Orphans. By Mary J. Holmes.
English Traits. By R. W. Emerson.
Essays in Criticism. (First and Second Series.) By Matthew Arnold.
Essays of Elia. By Charles Lamb.
Esther. By Rosa N. Carey.
Ethelyn's Mistake. By Mary J. Holmes.
Evangeline. (with notes.) By H. W. Longfellow.
Evelina. By Frances Burney.
Fair Maid of Perth. By Sir Walter Scott.
Fairy Land of Science. By Arabella B. Buckley.
Faust. (Goethe.) Translated by Anna Swanwick.
Felix Holt. By George Eliot.
Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World. By E. S. Creasy.
File No. 113. By Emile Gaboriau.
Firm of Girdlestone. By A. Conan Doyle.
First Principles. By Herbert Spencer.
First Violin. By Jessie Fothergill.
For Lilias. By Rosa N. Carey.
Fortunes of Nigel. By Sir Walter Scott.
Forty-Five Guardsmen. By Alexandre Dumas.
Foul Play. By Charles Reade.
Fragments of Science. By John Tyndall.
Frederick, the Great, Life of By Francis Kugler.
Frederick the Great and His Court. By Louisa Muhlbach.
French Revolution. By Thomas Carlyle.
From the Earth to the Moon. By Jules Verne.
Garibaldi, General, Life of. By Theodore Dwight.
Gil Blas, Adventures of. By A. R. Le Sage.
Gold Bug and Other Tales. By Edgar A. Poe.
Gold Elsie. By E. Marlitt.
Golden Treasury. By Francis T. Palgrave.
Goldsmith's Poems. By Oliver Goldsmith.
Grandfather's Chair. By Nathaniel Hawthorne.
Grant, Ulysses S., Life of. By J. T. Headley.
Gray's Poems. By Thomas Gray.
Great Expectations. By Charles Dickens.
Greek Heroes. Fairy Tales for My Children. By Charles Kingsley.
Green Mountain Boys, The. By D. P. Thompson.
Grimm's Household Tales. By the Brothers Grimm.
Grimm's Popular Tales. By the Brothers Grimm.
Gulliver's Travels. By Dean Swift
Guy Mannering. By Sir Walter Scott

Hale, Nathan, the Martyr Spy. By CHARLOTTE MOLYNEUX HOLLOWAY.
Handy Andy. By SAMUEL LOVER.
Hans of Iceland. By VICTOR HUGO.
Hannibal, the Carthaginian, Life of. By THOMAS ARNOLD, M. A.
Hardy Norseman, A. By EDNA LYALL.
Harold. By BULWER-LYTTON.
Harry Lorrequer. By CHARLES LEVER.
Heart of Midlothian. By SIR WALTER SCOTT.
Heir of Redclyffe. By CHARLETTE M. YONGE.
Hemans' Poems. By MRS. FELICIA HEMANS.
Henry Esmond. By WM. M. THACKERAY.
Henry, Patrick, Life of. By WILLIAM WIRT.
Her Dearest Foe. By MRS. ALEXANDER.
Hereward. By CHARLES KINGSLEY.
Heriot's Choice. By ROSA N. CAREY.
Heroes and Hero-Worship. By THOMAS CARLYLE.
Hiawatha. (WITH NOTES.) By H. W. LONGFELLOW.
Hidden Hand, The. (COMPLETE.) By MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH.
History of a Crime. By VICTOR HUGO.
History of Civilization in Europe. By M. GUIZOT.
Holmes' Poems. (EARLY) By OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.
Holy Roman Empire. By JAMES BRYCE.
Homestead on the Hillside. By MARY J. HOLMES.
Hood's Poems. By THOMAS HOOD.
House of the Seven Gables. By NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.
Hunchback of Notre Dame. By VICTOR HUGO.
Hypatia. By CHARLES KINGSLEY.
Hyperion. By HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.
Iceland Fisherman, By PIERRE LOTI.
Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow. By JEROME K. JEROME.
Iliad, POPE'S TRANSLATION.
Inez. By AUGUSTA J. EVANS.
Ingelow's Poems. By JEAN INGELOW.
Initials. By THE BARONESS TAUTPHOEUS.
Intellectual Life. By PHILIP G. HAMERTON.
In the Counsellor's House. By E. MARLITT.
In the Golden Days. By EDNA LYALL
In the Heart of the Storm. By MAXWELL GRAY.
In the Schillingscourt. By E. MARLITT.
Ishmael. (COMPLETE) By MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH.
It Is Never Too Late to Mend. By CHARLES READE
Ivanhoe. By SIR WALTER SCOTT.
Jane Eyre. By CHARLOTTE BRONTE.
Jefferson, Thomas, Life of. By SAMUEL M. SCHMUCKER, LL.D.
Joan of Arc, Life of. By JULES MICHELET.
John Halifax, Gentleman. By MISS MULOCK.
Jones, John Paul, Life of. By JAMES OTIS.
Joseph Balsamo. By ALEXANDRE DUMAS.
Josephine, Empress of France, Life of By FREDERICK A. OBER
Keats' Poems. By JOHN KEATS.
Kenilworth. By SIR WALTER SCOTT.
Kidnapped. By R. L. STEVENSON.
King Arthur and His Noble Knights. By MARY MACLEOD.
Knickerbocker's History of New York. By WASHINGTON IRVING.
Knight Errant. By EDNA LYALL.
Koran. TRANSLATED BY GEORGE SALE.
Lady of the Lake. (WITH NOTES.) By SIR WALTER SCOTT.
Lady with the Rubies. By E. MARLITT.
Lafayette, Marquis de, Life of. By P. C. HEADLEY.
Lalla Rookh. (WITH NOTES.) By THOMAS MOORE.
Lamplighter. By MARIA S. CUMMINS.
Last Days of Pompeii. By BULWER-LYTTON.
Last of the Barons. By BULWER-LYTTON.
Last of the Mohicans. By JAMES FENIMORE COOPER.
Lay of the Last Minstrel. (WITH NOTES.) By SIR WALTER SCOTT.
Lee, General Robert E., Life of. By G. MERCER ADAM.
Lena Rivers. By MARY J HOLMES.
Life of Christ. By FREDERICK W. FARRAR.
Life of Jesus. By ERNEST RENAN.
Light of Asia. By SIR EDWIN ARNOLD
Light That Failed. By RUDYARD KIPLING.
Lincoln, Abraham, Life of. By HENRY KETCHAM.
Lincoln's Speeches. SELECTED AND EDITED BY G. MERCER ADAM.
Literature and Dogma. By MATTHEW ARNOLD
Little Dorrit. By CHARLES DICKENS.
Little Minister. By JAMES M. BARRIE.
Livingstone, David, Life of. By THOMAS HUGHES.
Longfellow's Poems. (EARLY.) By HENRY W LONGFELLOW
Lorna Doone. By R. D. BLACKMORE.
Louise de la Valliere. By ALEXANDRE DUMAS.
Love Me Little, Love Me Long. By CHARLES READE.

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 051 552 8